

Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons

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A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics

Gelovige betrokkenheid in het luisteren naar preken

Een Grounded Theory studie in empirische theologie en homiletiek

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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*For Margreet,
Joëlla and Christo*

Shine forth within our hearts the
incorruptible light of Thy knowledge,
O Master, Lover of mankind, and
open the eyes of our mind to the
understanding of the preaching of
Thy Gospel.

The Divine Liturgy
JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (244—407)

“Narnia, Narnia, Narnia word
wakker. Heb lief. Denk. Spreek.
Wees lopende bomen. Wees
pratende dieren. Wees goddelijke
wateren.” Het was natuurlijk de stem
van de Leeuw.

Het neefje van de tovenaars,
hoofdstuk 9
C.S. LEWIS

So faith comes from hearing, and
hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10, 17 (ESV)
ST. PAUL

PREFACE

In 1993 I began as a theology student at Utrecht University. In my undergraduate and graduate work I mainly focussed upon systematic theology and I am deeply indebted to Prof. Antoon Vos and Prof. Willem van Asselt for the meticulous training I received as well as for the many opportunities they provided me with to develop my theological mind. They intellectually unlocked the rich tradition of the Church, which I found to be in startling harmony with the candid spiritual climate in which my parents have raised me. In a sense, this study brings me back to where theology starts: hearing God's Word. As I have been taught, both at home and in academia, thinking comes after believing, because God's abundant love in Christ precedes all our thinking and writing.

I am very grateful to my promotor, Prof. Gerrit Immink, that he offered me a post at the Reformed Theological Institute, at present the Protestant Theological University, to expand my theological studies into the field of practical theology as a PhD researcher. Much earlier than I was able to realise, he acknowledged the significance of a thorough systematic training in theology before embarking on the empirical study of religion. Thanks to his theological approach to practical theology, he opened up a paradigm for the empirical study of ordinary practices of faith. He kept on talking theology and left methodology to his PhD students, because he was more afraid that we would silently drop sound theology while lingering over empirical methodology, then the other way round. Our countless conversations over lunchtime and numerous talks on the nature and study of religious practices have not been in vain. The book finally got released. This is not just a relief for me, but also for him, although he has always kept confident that it could be done.

Many others have contributed to this project. First of all, several ministers assisted in contacting respondents for the interviews. The respondents themselves, whose names are fictional in this book, were eager to participate, which I am very grateful for. I followed courses in empirical methodology by NOSTER, the Netherlands School for the Study of Theology and Religion, and I was generously welcomed at courses for qualitative analysis and interviewing by Prof. Andries Baart (Tilburg University). Dr Sebastian Rehnman (University of Stavanger)

pointed me to the stimulating field of realist phenomenology. Prof. John S. McClure (Vanderbilt University) challenged me to present my views on the use of Grounded Theory in his class of PhD students and the occasion was of great help to integrate social science methods and theological methodology. I have had the benefit of conversations during the International conferences of the Societas Homiletica, the meetings of the ‘Promovierendenberating’ with colleagues from Göttingen and Basel and of the Dutch society for homiletics. I also mention the stimulating discussions in the practical section of the PhD-forum of the ‘Gereformeerde Bond’ with Marinus Beute, Rev. Frits van Santen, Dr Hanneke Schaap-Jonker, Harm Wijnalda, and Prof. Wim Verboom. I enjoy the meetings with my theological friends Dr Martijn Bac, Rev. Bastiaan Belder, Rev. Dr Willem Maarten Dekker, Frans Hoogendijk, Rev. Johan Prosman, Marinus Schouten and Willem-Jan de Wit. We share a passion for the theological heritage of the Church and its mission in today’s world. From 2001-2005 I shared a room with my fellow doctoral students: Rev. Richard Saly, Dr Coen Constandse, Rev. Dr Willem Maarten Dekker and Dr Martijn Bac. Your company was a great pleasure! Without Richard the journey into empirical theology had been a solitary enterprise.

My gratitude extends to those who helped me out in various practicalities that concern research and writing. Robert Voogdgeert volunteered during various lunches to teach a beginners course in L^AT_EX and it was fun to solve typographical issues with Dr Izaak de Hulster. The colleagues at the administrative office of the University, Marja, Hanna, Henk Jan and Annemarie, have always been very cooperative to find solutions for all kinds of practical problems, from coffee to photocopying. During the final weeks of preparing the manuscript for publication, Adrienne Belder was of enormous help with suggesting corrections to the English text of this book.

Finishing a PhD dissertation while being a full-time minister has proved more a challenge than I could ever imagine. I was kept on course by fraternal conversations with my mentor Rev. Jelke de Jong. The generous attitude of the church board of Langerak had been most encouraging. Yet the decisive impetus came from Margreet, my wife. With a tremendous amount of confidence and energy, she sacrificially supported my work. Greatly interested, Joëlla and Christo continued to ask: ‘Is je boek al af?’ Well, yes, it is now. To the three of you I dedicate this book.

May 2010, Theo Pleizier

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1

RESEARCHING SERMON-LISTENING

1.1 DOING THEOLOGY IN THE REAL WORLD

What happens religiously when church-members participate in an ordinary worship service and hear a sermon? This study provides an answer to this—in some respect—mundane question. It presents an empirical analysis of the practice of listening and shows how sermon listening may be conceptualised as the basic social-religious process of ‘getting religiously involved in the sermon’. I will demonstrate that this process consists of three stages. The first stage of *opening up* depends on the *listener’s religious receptivity*. The second stage of *dwelling in the sermon* breaks down into three sub-processes: *experiencing*, *perceiving* and *identifying*. Finally, in the third stage of listening *actualising faith* ‘happens’. The third part of this study presents these stages and their properties in more detail.¹ Empirical research in theology, however, depends upon a particular approach of practices of faith and proceeds according to methodical canons. These issues are addressed in the first and second part of this study.

A protestant theology of the sermon entails the conviction that in preaching the listener interacts with ‘the Word of God’ in, through, and beyond the discourse of the preacher.² Among the religious practices in protestantism ‘hearing’ may even be considered primary.³ Faith is born from hearing, as St. Paul writes in his famous statement in Romans 10: 17. In the very same letter, Paul argues that the message of God’s justifying grace grounds the Christian existence. The German homiletician Manfred Josuttis puts it like this: ‘Christian identity is

1. For a list of the 5 central categories and their 17 properties that have been generated during this study, see appendix C on page 305. For an integrated diagram, see figure 5.5 on page 153.

2. About the development of this protestant conviction in the history of preaching, see C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005). See further below, section 1.3.

3. B. C. Johnson, *The God Who Speaks. Listening to the Language of God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

constituted in hearing as far as in the act of justification a powerful, creative judgement about a human being is uttered.⁴ Obviously, this religious qualification of preaching and listening does not intend to deny the influence of communicative, rhetorical, and social-psychological processes and conditions in the preaching event. Contemporary homiletics sufficiently bears witness to the importance of these anthropological dimensions. Various recent studies in sermon reception clarify how the psychological make-up of the listener and the rhetorical qualities of the preacher's performance correlate with the formation of meaning and the processes of understanding on the part of the listener. Yet hermeneutical and psychological notions like understanding, emotional security, and meaning do not conceptualize sufficiently what occurs *religiously* in the act of listening. Precisely that is at stake in this study.

Like all research, practical-theology is concerned with the reflective, structural generation, and analysis of data. Generally, results in research are tentative and hypothetical, open for further testing, to validate or refute. Theories are scholarly products. They present conceptual reconstructions to understand the bits and pieces of reality. Science and research are relative to the researcher's mind no less than they are to reality. Ultimately, this entails a fundamental respect for the real world as 'the actual context where whatever we are interested in occurs, whether it be an office, school, hospital, home, street or sports stadium.'⁵ Colin Robson explains in his *Real world research* how this kind of research is specifically concerned with those places and contexts in which human life 'happens.' Robson's interest in real life has also permeated the social scientific and likewise practical-theological research.⁶ Dorothy Bass starts a collection of essays with the question: 'But what does that have to do with *real* life' and she continues explaining real life as 'the messy realm of work, love, celebration, and suffering where human beings dwell and thus where Christian life and ministry

4. M. Josuttis, *Der Weg in das Leben. Eine Einführung in den Gottesdienst auf verhaltenswissenschaftlicher Grundlage*. (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1993), p. 206.

5. C. Robson, *Real World Research. A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. 2nd edition. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 3, 10–15. For a slightly different account of the ontological perspective in research, see J. Mason, *Qualitative Researching. Second edition*. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 14–16.

6. Cf. W.-E. Failing and H.-G. Heimbrock, *Gelebte Religion wahrnehmen. Lebenswelt - Alltagskultur - Religionspraxis*. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998); Dinter, A., Heimbrock, H.-G. and Söderblom, K., editors, *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie. Gelebte Religion erforschen*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Streib, H., Dinter, A. and Söderblom, K., editors, *Lived Religion - Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches. Essays in Honor of Hans-Günter Heimbrock*. (Brill Academic Publishers, 2008); and for social studies, cf. Ammerman, N. T., editor, *Everyday Religion. Observing Modern Religious Lives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); M. B. McGuire, *Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. (Oxford University Press, 2008).

take place.⁷ Concrete practices—as ‘things religious people do together’⁸—are an important, though often neglected or even consciously bypassed, source for theological knowledge when theologians ‘sometimes do teach and write as if [they] have made a studied effort to avoid contact with the “impurities” of human lives.’⁹

This book builds upon Robson’s insistence on studying the real world and the practical-theological interest in lived faith. Every study departs from a ‘theoretical perspective’¹⁰ and deals with issues like the nature of theory, the epistemological conditions for research, the ontology of the field, and the methodologies to engage with reality. This also holds for practical-theology.¹¹ Here I develop a view that is based upon Robson’s realist position: practices of faith, believing communities and individuals, albeit only tangible through humanly constructed concepts, are realities that deserve scholarly scrutiny beyond the philosophical fashions of the day.¹² In his argument for realism Robson is very much aware of the difficulties surrounding what is commonly known as ‘naïve realism’, the simple view in which knowledge mirrors reality just as it is. The opposite of positivism, a relativistic understanding of knowledge and reality, is equally problematic. To avoid both extremes, Robson refers to thinkers like Roy Bhaskar and Rom Harré to defend a positive—though not ‘positivist’—position which is called ‘new realism’ to distinguish real world research from positivism and relativism.¹³ This commitment to realism ultimately grounds the ethics of research:

7. D. C. Bass, ‘Introduction’ in: M. Volf and D. C. Bass, editors, *Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 1.

8. Adapted from Bass and Dykstra’s definition of practice ‘things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world’. See C. Dykstra and D. C. Bass, ‘A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices’ in: M. Volf and D. C. Bass, editors, *Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 18.

9. M. Volf, ‘Theology for a Way of Life’ in: M. Volf and D. C. Bass, editors, *Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 245. Cf. also H. Luther, *Religion und Alltag. Bausteine zu einer praktischen Theologie des Subjekts*. (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1992).

10. Cf. M. Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research. Meaning and perspective in the research process*. (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 2–11.

11. For the realist-constructionist discussion in practical theology, see Hermans, C. et al., editors, *Social Constructionism and Theology*. Volume 7, Empirical Studies in Theology. (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002). Cf. also F. G. Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), Ch. 11.

12. I deal with realism in relation to concept-formation in more depth in section 4.4. The fact that realism is very much alive in contemporary religious studies and theology is amply sustained in publications like P. Byrne, *God and Realism*. (Ashgate, 2003); Moore, A. and Scott, M., editors, *Realism and Religion. Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*. (Ashgate, 2007).

13. Other labels are possible: scientific realism, critical realism, transcendental realism, or fallibilistic realism, to name a few. See Robson, *Real World Research*, p. 29. See for contemporary

rather than entertaining their 'sacred' constructions scholars have a duty to do justice to the real world. Practical-theology has its own theological reasons to affirm that 'reality is both real and, in principle, accessible.'¹⁴

A theological interest in the real world of faith and religion takes for granted the existence of God 'as a reality independent of our human belief in God'.¹⁵ This claim is rather modest as Archer, Collier, and Porpora argue, because both experiences and non-experiences of God are epistemologically equal.¹⁶ The experiences of God are part of the real world. In order to assess them, however, we have to approach the real world with help of religious rubrics. Because of the theoretical ladenness of research, it matters whether reality is studied mainly as source for social-scientific knowledge or when it is approached to find 'religion at work'. A substantial theological framework includes typical Christian experiential notions like the redemptive presence of Christ, spiritual atmospheres, or the liberating vision of the Kingdom of God. Religion is concerned with life-as-it-happens in its qualities of being created and redeemed, and its hope for ultimate renewal. The real world consists of those places, contexts, and activities in which God is praised, in which sin is confessed, in which gratitude for redemption is expressed, and in which the expectation of the overcoming of suffering and death is kept alive. Among those concrete places are: churches, worship services, prayer meetings, diaconal ministries, religious education in families and schools, and pastoral care.

Because the conditions for such religious beliefs are highly weakened in a secular age, it is tempting to reconstruct real life in mere anthropological categories.¹⁷ Belief in a God who acts both creatively and redemptively may be the object for philosophers of religion¹⁸, the practices in which this is named, received and celebrated have seldom been studied empirically in their *religious* qualities. On the other hand, however, what happens in worship services, situations of religious education in families and schools, contexts of pastoral counseling does not terminate in the social or psychological only. The notion 'faith' reminds us

and well-argued defences of classical or external realism: J. Seifert, *Back to 'Things in Themselves'. A phenomenological foundation for classical realism*. Second (electronic) edition. (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1997); J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: philosophy in the real world*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998).

14. J. Swinton and H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 37.

15. M. S. Archer, A. Collier and D. V. Porpora, *Transcendence. Critical realism and God*. (Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–6.

17. Cf. C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 1–22.

18. Cf. Tracy, T. F., editor, *The God who Acts. Philosophical and Theological Explorations*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1994).

of the fact that the relationship with God, the actual practicing of religion and the various connecting activities such as prayer and holy communion, denotes something in the real world that could not be captured sufficiently in social or psychological categories but presupposes a divine-human relationship.¹⁹ Rowan Williams aptly observes that

[t]here is a practice of common life and language already there, a practice that defines a specific shared way of interpreting human life as lived in relation to God. The meanings of the word 'God' are to be discovered by watching what this community does—not only when it is consciously reflecting in conceptual ways, but when it is acting, educating or 'inducting', imagining and worshipping.²⁰

To keep theology firmly rooted into concrete human existence it needs an empirical method to do so. This prevents theology from an upward flight in mystical speculation, a backward cherishing of a dearly valued religious past, and an impressionistic rendering of its present. The study of 'human life as lived in relation to God', the real world of faith, or lived religion is particularly the domain of practical theology.²¹ The study of faith *as it occurs in the real world* moves beyond history, exegesis and dogmatics into the empirical realm.²² The systematic application of empirical methods produces theories of religious practices that describe, explain and understand this exciting but problematic dimension of the Christian religion as part of the real world.²³ This study conceives of listening to a sermon as an instance of faith *as it appears in the real world*. It builds upon two important homiletical assumptions: 1. in the listening event hearers relate to and interact with God in various ways; 2. the divine-human dynamics is part of the broader interhuman communicative event called 'preaching'. These assumptions are not very surprising for they have already been stated in many other publications. The core task of this study, however, is to point out how

19. Immink, *Faith*, pp. 21–42.

20. R. Williams, *On Christian Theology*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), Challenges in Contemporary Theology, p. xii.

21. For the sake of convenience I use the term 'practical theology' here. Yet it might be better to speak of theology-of-religious-practices, like systematic theology is essentially theology-of-religious-beliefs.

22. Cf. H.-G. Ziebertz, 'Empirische Forschung in der Praktischen Theologie als eigenständige Form des Theologie-Treibens'. *Praktische Theologie*, 39 (2004):1, p. 54.

23. The empirical orientation to lived-religion is typical for contemporary practical theology, see Failing and Heimbrock, *Gelebte Religion*; H.-G. Heimbrock, 'Given Through the Senses. A Phenomenological Model of Empirical Theology'. in: J. A. van der Ven and M. Scherer-Rath, editors, *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*. (Brill, 2005); H.-G. Heimbrock, 'From Data to Theory. Elements of Methodology in Empirical Phenomenological Research in Practical Theology'. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 9 (2005). For a practice-based rather than functional approach to religion, see M. Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen*. (München: C.H. Beck, 2007).

they may be accounted for theoretically in terms of dimensions, processes and types.²⁴

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Within this basic framework of doing theology in the real world, I locate this study in three fields. First, I introduce the topic of sermon reception within the area of homiletics (section 1.3). Next, I present my research design in terms of Grounded Theory methodology (section 1.4). Thirdly, I place this study in the larger field of practical theology (section 1.5). These three sections are introduced as empirical-homiletical, methodological and practical-theological perspectives.²⁵ They constitute the three main disciplinary contexts for justification: homiletics, research methodology and practical-theology respectively, and introduce the three main parts of this study:

- PART I explores the interhuman (Chapter 2) and religious (Chapter 3) dimensions of the area of research and builds upon the homiletical perspective.
- PART II methodically extrapolates the methodological perspective. The basic procedures and methods of Grounded Theory are explained (Chapter 4) and the route from data to theory is shown (Chapter 5).
- PART III demonstrates how the practical-theological perspective shapes the theoretical framework of 'getting religiously involved between receptivity and actualising faith' as outcome of the research process (Chapters 6–10).

24. This task is very 'theoretical', since dimensions, types, processes and properties are 'theoretical concepts'. See B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Coding. The Grounded Theory Perspective*, volume 3. (Sociology Press, 2005). See further below section 1.5 and Chapter 5.4.

25. The notion 'perspective' is used here in its proper linguistic understanding as 'a way of thinking about something' and should not be conflated with a relativistic epistemology such as in B. Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science. A Multicultural Approach*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

1.3 EMPIRICAL-HOMILETICAL PERSPECTIVE: TURNING TO THE LISTENER AND RECEPTION RESEARCH

When practical-theology took the empirical turn during the sixties of the previous century, homiletics soon followed with a new emphasis on ‘real preaching’.²⁶ Ernst Lerle’s brief book thus presents a first ‘outline of empirical homiletics’.²⁷ A growing interest in rhetoric, as reaction against dialectical theology²⁸, was paired with the discovery of the emerging science of (mass)communication. Two dissertations in the seventies exemplify how communication studies and empirical research began to frame homiletical reasoning and demonstrate the changing landscape of homiletics: Grandthyll’s interest in empirical sermon reception (1977)²⁹ and Bartholomäus’ proposal of a *theory of theological communication* (1972).³⁰ Bartholomäus stresses the need for an empirical turn in homiletics because

[w]ithout empirical research and the study of all elements in processes of communication in churches, practical theology will not be able to meet its needs at the end of the day. The results of such research must be integrated into a theological framework and interpreted accordingly. With this assignment homiletics (like religious education) enters its empirical turn.³¹

Strictly speaking, the empirical sciences are rather young compared to other academic disciplines; the application of their methods and approaches in practical-theology are even more recent. Yet homiletical reflection has always dealt with the ‘real world’. The first homiletical treatises, like Augustin’s *De doctrina Christiana*, integrate all kinds of reality-based rhetorical insights to ensure the best possible communication of the gospel. That preachers must accommodate their sermons to all kinds of ‘real’ people and their diversity is aptly addressed by Gregory the Great in his ‘catalogue of listeners’ that includes the poor and the rich, the forward and the fainthearted, the meek and the passionate as well as ‘those who prosper in what they desire in temporal matters; and those who covet

26. Cf. W. Trillhaas, ‘Die wirkliche Predigt’. in: A. Beutel, editor, *Homiletisches Lesebuch. Texte zur heutigen Predigtlehre*. (Tübingen: Katzmann, 1989).

27. E. Lerle, *Grundriss der empirischen Homiletik*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1974).

28. Cf. M. Josuttis, ‘Homiletik und Rhetorik’. in: *Homiletik und Rhetorik in der Predigtarbeit. Homiletische Studien* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1985) (published in 1968 in *Pastoral Theologie* 57. Also, G. Otto, *Predigt als Rede. Über die Wechselwirkungen von Homiletik und Rhetorik*. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1976).

29. B. Grandthyll, *Die Wirkung der Predigt. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer empirischen Überprüfung*. (Münster, 1977).

30. W. Bartholomäus, *Evangelium als Information. Elemente einer Theologischen Kommunikationstheorie am Beispiel der Osterbotschaft*. (Zürich: Benzinger, 1972).

31. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

indeed the things that are of the world, and yet are wearied with the toils of adversity.³² Even a typical example of ‘deductive’ homiletics like T. Hoekstra’s *Reformed homiletics* shows an interest in the real listener in the chapters on rhetoric and psychology.³³ Pre-twentieth century homiletics can only be called ‘non-empirical’ anachronistically but to neglect its real-world intentions would be grossly unfair.

Bartholomaeus, however, rightly indicates a new direction for the field in moving homiletics from a kind of applied theology towards a more mature scientific discipline. Due to the fact that communication studies in the sixties and seventies focussed on message, message production and transmission, his primary category to understand preaching is ‘information’.³⁴ Yet he was among the first to acknowledge the importance of integrating theological and communicative concepts to understand preaching as ‘proclaiming the gospel’.³⁵

Grandthyll’s study³⁶ presents a first example of research in sermon reception. He rigourously applies empirical methods to the field of preaching. His study is framed by persuasive theories of communication, ‘American communication research’, and factors of succesful learning in theories of education.³⁷ A quantative survey is conducted and the data are analysed with help of statistical procedures like correlations and factor-analyses. Consequently, the results are thoroughly empirical in the sense that they are validated hypotheses by means of empirical testing. Further, his study marks the transition from message and preacher-centred approaches to an audience-centred approach. The first hypothesis offered for validation is the idea that the ‘listener [is] subject in the process of communication’.³⁸ In this first phase of reception research Grandthyll’s approach has the characteristics of evaluation-research³⁹; in a later phase reception research—such as from a clinical pastoral perspective—moves towards a more substantial understanding what goes on when listeners engage in

32. Cited from R. Lischer, *The Company of Preachers. Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002), pp. 356–357.

33. T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde homiletiek*. (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1926), pp. 31–59, see also his chapter on ‘application’, pp. 299–315.

34. For message-production and transmission theories in the study of communication, see S. W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*. 7th edition. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002).

35. Interestingly, contemporary communication studies draw attention to the religious aspect of communication. Quentin Schulze, for instance, insists that divine grace is vital for any form of human communication. See Q. J. Schultze, *Communicating for Life. Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000); Q. J. Schultze, ‘The ‘God-problem’ in Communication studies’. *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 28 (2005):1.

36. Grandthyll, *Die Wirkung der Predigt*.

37. Ibid., pp. 25–68.

38. Ibid., p. 69.

39. Cf. Ibid., p. 273.

hearing a sermon, what communicative hindrances or expectations like security or understanding frame the listening experience.⁴⁰

Empirical research has become an integral part of homiletics but it would be too presumptuous to reduce the discipline to its empirical orientation. That homiletics has become empirical does not change the fact that preaching is an art. In his recent book Grözinger argues how preaching is a cultural, an aesthetic, and a religious phenomenon.⁴¹ Despite the emphasis on the empirical study of religion preaching's defining characteristic is probably better expressed in terms of art: from the point of view of preachers, preaching is an 'art of living'.⁴² The interest in the real listener, however, definitely has changed the discipline. A permanent part of the house of homiletics rather than a trendy temporary extension is reserved for the listener who artfully lives his life of faith—with a little help of sermons. At least that is what many preachers hope for. Whether this hope is in vain or not, how sermons are used by listeners in their everyday practice of faith, what exactly happens religiously in listening to a sermon, and what the art of listening entails can only be studied with help of empirical methods.

The empirical turn in homiletics thus entailed a turn to the listener and moved research into the direction of sermon reception.⁴³ At both sides of the Atlantic the listener-centered approach took different forms each with his own tenets. In Europe on the one hand, the German theologian Ernst Lange became famous for his phrase: 'I talk to the listener about his life' (*Ich rede mit dem Hörer über sein Leben*). Lange focussed on the life-situation of the listener in which the preached gospel is received between contestation and promise. His approach generated all kinds of hermeneutical reflection addressing the interrelatedness of the human condition and the gospel. The sermon was no longer seen as the application of timeless truths. But preaching, according to Lange, constitutes a 'new word' (*neues Wort*) situated in this particular unique human situation.⁴⁴ The

40. H. C. Piper, *Predigtanalysen. Kommunikation und Kommunikationsstörungen in der Predigt*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976); H. van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit. The impact of personality in preaching*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982).

41. A. Grözinger, *Homiletik. Lehrbuch Praktische Theologie*. (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008).

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 327–328.

43. F. G. Immink, 'Homiletics. The Current Debate'. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 8 (2004). Cf. also R. J. Allen, 'The Turn to the Listener. A Selective Review of a Recent Trend in Preaching'. *Encounter*, 64 (2003):2.

44. E. Lange, *Predigen als Beruf*. (Stuttgart / Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1976). Cf. also J. van der Laan, *Ernst Lange en de prediking. Een inleiding in zijn homiletische theorie*. (Kampen: Kok, 1989); A. W. Velema, *God ter sprake. Een homiletisch onderzoek naar de vooronderstellingen van de prediking bij Karl Barth in vergelijking met Hans Joachim Iwand, Ernst Lange en Rudolf Bohren*. ('s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum B.V., 1991); W. Gräb, "Ich rede mit dem Hörer über sein Leben". Ernst Langes Anstöße zu einer neuen Homiletik. *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft*

American theologian Fred Craddock on the other hand became known as one of the first proponents of the New Homiletic with his insistence upon 'inductive preaching'.⁴⁵ Craddock's concern was to create a movement in the sermon that contributed to the communal experiencing of the Word and enabled the listener to participate in the sermon. His approach led to various creative models for sermon construction⁴⁶ and preaching from different biblical genres.⁴⁷ The turn to the listener thus originated from two perspectives: the situation of the listener (Lange) and the process of listening (Craddock), while fitting a more broader tendency within practical theology on the whole.⁴⁸

In retrospect the turn to the listener opened new horizons for homiletics to flourish. Directly or indirectly, it generated a wide variety of publications, ranging from situating the listener in the landscape of postmodern philosophy⁴⁹ to speculative (because pre-empirical) ideas on how listeners craft meaning in the open space of the sermon as a piece of art.⁵⁰ Meaning-formation became the dominant metaphor to understand the processes of listening. Researching sermon reception, however, seemed blocked by the paradigm of 'sermon effects'.

und Praxis, 86 (1997). The notion 'homiletic situation' is further developed in J. Hermelink, *Die homiletische Situation. Zur jüngeren Geschichte eines Predigtproblems*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

45. F. B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority. Revised and with New Sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001). On the New Homiletic, see also R. Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching. New Options in Homiletic Method*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); F. G. Immink, 'In gesprek met de 'New Homiletic'. Literatuurbericht homiletiek. *Praktische Theologie*, 28 (2001):3; R. Reid, J. Bullock and D. Fleer, 'Preaching as the Creation of an Experience. The Not-So-Rational Revolution for the New Homiletic'. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 18 (1995):1; M. Nicol, 'Homiletiek'. *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 123 (1998):11. Also F. B. Craddock, *Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985).

46. D. G. Buttrick, *Homiletic. Moves and Structures*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); E. L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot. The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Expanded edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

47. T. G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*. (Louisville: Fortress Press, 1989); T. G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. (Fortress Press, 1988).

48. Cf. the influence of Carl Roger's client-centred approach to counseling in pastoral theology such as in Thomas Oden's work. See D. van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology & Pastoral Counseling. A New Interdisciplinary Approach*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 35–45.

49. I. Reuter, *Predigt Verstehen. Grundlagen einer homiletischen Hermeneutik*. Volume 17, *Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie*. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000); J. S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. (Chalice Press, 2001); B. Altena, *Wolken gaan voorbij... Een homiletisch onderzoek naar mogelijkheden voor de preek in een postmodern klimaat*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003).

50. G. M. Martin, 'Predigt als "offenes Kunstwerk"? Zum Dialog zwischen Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik'. *Evangelische Theologie*, 44 (1984); A. Beutel, 'Offene Predigt. Homiletische Bemerkungen zu Sprache und Sache'. *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft und Praxis*, 77 (1988); Garhammer, E. and Schöttler, H.-G., editors, *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk. Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik*. (München: Don Bosco, 1998).

Though survey after survey was done among listeners, reception research did not become truly audience centred.

Two large studies may illustrate this focus on sermon effects.⁵¹ First, the large German project directed by the Hannover-research group was designed to test certain qualities of sermons to a large population (6000 listeners).⁵² Generally, two distinct types of sermons—a personal-dialogical and a dogmatic-proclaiming type—were described (volume 1) and evaluated by the listeners subsequently (volume 2). The goal of research was to establish communicative conditions for preaching, particularly for the personal-dialogical type of preaching.⁵³ Next, a similarly large, recently released American project (4 volumes) studied the role of various rhetorical categories—such as ethos, pathos, and logos—in the act of listening.⁵⁴ The research focussed on questions of how listeners engage with sermon-content (logos), of how they experience the personality of the preacher (ethos), and of how they interact with the sermon in terms of feelings (pathos).⁵⁵

Further, two recent Dutch studies in sermon reception depart from the religious ideas of preaching as God's Word and the encounter with God in listening. Ciska Stark relates characteristics of sermons (text or application based) to evaluations of listeners. She distinguishes between six types of preaching according to a dimension of 'Word' (sermons are text or application centered) and a dimension of 'Spirit' (preaching is kerugmatic, didactic or paracletic).⁵⁶

51. I confine myself to the larger development rather than summarizing all the findings. That has been done elsewhere, see for a rather complete overview H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 100–106.

52. The empirical research is presented in two volumes: K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigten. Analysen und Grundausswertung*. Volume 1, *Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung*. (München: Kaiser, 1980) (volume 1) and K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören. Band II. Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hörern. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*. (München: Kaiser, 1982), *Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung* (volume 2); followed by extensive theological commentary and homiletical reflection: K.-F. Daiber, *Predigt als religiöse Rede. Homiletische Überlegungen im Anschluß an eine empirische Untersuchung*. Volume 3, *Predigen und Hören*. (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1991) (volume 3).

53. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören II*, pp. 334.

54. The third volume in the series is slightly different and less preconceived and addresses various issues that surface in the interviews with listeners like the listener's relationship with the preacher, how preaching shapes the faith community, and issues concerning the embodiment of the sermon. There is some sense of categorization, patterns in the material are presented as clusters or sub-clusters. Cf. M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), p. 4. In a personal conversation Prof. John McClure confirmed that the book is an attempt to reach beyond pre-conception in order to move towards conceptualisation. See for the difference, section 1.4 and Chapter 4.

55. R. J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

56. Stark, *Proeven van de preek*, pp. 227–243.

Each type represents a particular mode of how preaching may refer to, actualise or represent God's Word.⁵⁷ Hanneke Schaap-Jonker relates characteristics of listeners (God image, personality and affective state of hearers) to the meaning of the sermon.⁵⁸ She concludes that the hearer's personality influences the perceived meaning of the sermon to a large extent. Special interest in her study is paid to what she called 'relational meaning' with indicators like feeling close to God, experiencing an encounter with God, and a the sense of God's presence.⁵⁹ Further, personality structure strongly indicates how listeners perceive the sermon, what themes they select in hearing, and how they relate to the sermon. Both content of meaning and the construction of meaning are influenced by psychological factors.⁶⁰ Stark and Schaap-Jonker explicitly address the religious aspects of sermon reception.

From this brief overview emerges that sermon reception research comes in two flavours: effect-research⁶¹ and audience-research.⁶² Effect-research takes place from a diversity of perspectives like behaviourism (Sterk⁶³ and Grandthyll), communicative action (the Hannover research group), and rhetoric (Allen et al.⁶⁴). Basically, effect-research asks the question 'what do (properties of) sermons do to listeners?' Audience research poses another question namely 'what do listeners do to sermons?' Examples of this approach address sermon evaluation (Stark), explain how characteristics of listeners influence the process meaning-making (Schaap-Jonker), or categorise a wide variety of aspects of reception (Allen et al.).

Both types of sermon reception research are well aware of the complexity of the phenomenon of preaching. Effects research does not solely treat listeners

57. Stark uses notions as sacramentality, actuality and referentiality to denote the various theological conceptions of preaching as God's Word. See Stark, *Proeven van de preek*, pp. 202–204.

58. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God*.

59. Ibid., p. 204.

60. Ibid., pp. 265–267.

61. For a detailed discussion of the effects of sermons, see further section 10.5.

62. For an overview of the various traditions in reception research in general, see K. B. Jensen and K. E. Rosengren, 'Five Traditions in Search of the Audience'. *European Journal of Communication*, 5 (1990):3. Audience or reception research has a rich history and ranges from reception theory in literary traditions (cf. R. C. Holub, *Reception Theory. A critical introduction*. (London: Methuen, 1984); S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1980)) to the broad field of audience analysis in the cultural or critical study of communication (cf. D. McQuail, *Audience Analysis*. (London: Sage Publications, 1997); A. Ruddock, *Understanding Audiences. Theory and Method*. (London: Sage Publications, 2001)).

63. J. G. M. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders. Sociologische exploratie onder katholieke kerkgangers in de Bondsrepubliek Duitsland*. (Nijmegen: Instituut voor toegepaste sociologie, 1975).

64. Particularly the first two volumes in the series 'Listening to listeners', J. S. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners. Homiletical Case Studies*. Volume 1, Channels of Listening. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004); Allen, *Hearing the Sermon*

as passive objects nor does audience research turn them into self-contained autonomous subjects.⁶⁵ Both paradigms are also conscious of the intricacies of communication, psychology and religion. Yet fundamental questions like ‘what is listening?’, ‘what does happen in listening?’, and ‘what does characterise listening to sermons as a specific socio-religious practice?’ are in both paradigms blocked by a pre-empirical interest in causes and influences. Either the listener causes the sermon to have meaning (audience research) or the sermon influences the listener (effects-research). Or perhaps both? The underlying concern remains what Jensen and Rosengren have called question of the ‘locus of control’ of meaning.⁶⁶ Is meaning controlled by the sermon, is it controlled by the listener or by both? The permeating issue of ‘control’, however, begs the larger issue of the nature of listening.

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND GROUNDED THEORY

Despite their different conceptualisations and research motivations, the various studies on sermon reception share three intertwined strands: 1. they study the individual unit of the listener rather than listening as *practice*;⁶⁷ 2. they enquire into evaluations, effects or meanings of the sermon in relation to the listener rather than into the inherent *religious function* of the preaching event; and 3. they present their (predominantly) quantitative findings as validations of pre-conceived hypotheses rather than developing a *theoretical account* of the listening event. Neither conceptual descriptions⁶⁸ nor a summarizing statement, in which research results are put into disciplinary perspectives,⁶⁹ count as practical theological theory in the sense of an integrated, explanatory, and parsimonious conceptual rendering of a religious area.⁷⁰

65. See section 2.4.3 for the topic of audience activity.

66. Jensen and Rosengren, ‘Five Traditions in Search of the Audience’.

67. This is done quantitatively in which one respondent represents a larger group of individuals (the criterium of representativity) or qualitatively in which an aggregate of individuals is categorised according to various patterns, such as feelings, experiences or convictions. In both cases the paradox remains that research results are about a population of listeners rather than the concept of listening behaviour.

68. Cf. Mulligan and Allen, *Believing in Preaching*.

69. Cf. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God*, pp. 294–295.

70. This view on theory is discussed below in more detail.

1.4.1 Research question

The three aspects of practice, religion and theory are characteristic for the approach in this study. What kind of practise is listening? What does happen in listening? And what features of listening are specific in ordinary congregational worship services? So the central research question for this study is:

What is religiously happening when listeners hear a sermon during ordinary congregational worship?

The question: ‘what is happening’, is typical for theory development⁷¹ because it has an explorative intention and a broad focus.

Rather than framing the issue of sermon reception in terms of causation and control, which have been the underlying interests in previous research, I approach the field of sermon listening as open as possible in order to discover the main (religious) concern of listeners resulting in an emerging set of theoretical patterns. In research methodology, openness, discovery and theory-formation are quite controversial notions yet they indicate some widely acknowledged virtues for studying qualitative data: as a reflective practitioner, the researcher constantly challenges his own preoccupations (openness), acknowledges and appreciates the ‘otherness’ of reality (discovery), and builds consistent, integrated and coherent renderings of pieces of data (theory formation). The reluctance to impose theoretical concepts on the field entails that the research question does not depart from predefined variables concerning features of the listener, properties of the sermon or characteristics of the performance by the preacher. So I do not ask how rhetorical qualities of the sermon work for the listener (like the American study *Listening by listeners*), nor do I enquire whether different styles of preaching (e.g. dogmatic versus personal styles) have a different outcome for the listener (like the Hannover study by Daiber c.s.⁷²), nor do I include dependent or independent variables such as the meaning of the sermon or the listener’s personality (like Schaap-Jonker⁷³) in the research question. Given the restriction of minimal theoretical import, the scope of the central research question that I propose is necessarily broad.

This broad focus, however, raises a few objections. First, the question denotes an area of research but lacks the level of specificity that is required for

71. Cf. K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 20–21.

72. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören II*, pp. 246–270.

73. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God*, p. 181.

a proper research question.⁷⁴ That the research question denotes an area and lacks specificity, however, is an important feature of doing Grounded Theory.⁷⁵ In Grounded Theory, the field of research is approached as ‘substantive area’. Through participation and observation, collecting or generating data within a particular area, refined research questions (or hypotheses) emerge⁷⁶ but in order to collect data, a careful demarcation of the substantive area is required. This is done in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study. Further, the cyclic nature of Grounded Theory research makes specificity an issue of method rather than of methodology. The specificity of research is not a meta-level issue of methodology but results from following particular methods and procedures during sampling and analysis. These issues are dealt with in great detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Theory formation must be about solving a particular problem according to Van der Ven in his review of Grounded Theory.⁷⁷ So a next objection against a broad research question concerns the lack of a particularly identified problem. The consequence of the open character of Grounded Theory, however, is that the researcher does not force a preconceived problem upon the participants in the substantive area and its goal is to discover the problem that is being resolved in the field by the participants.⁷⁸ In homiletical publications various ‘crises’ or problems that surround sermon-listening in a postmodern culture have been discerned, for example the problem that sermons fail to engage listeners, that they are not related to the listeners’ daily lives, or whether and how secularisation creates a cultural void for preaching. Yet these ‘problems’ are mainly deduced from cultural impressions, theological reasonings or social-scientific studies rather than grounded in the experiences, practices and reported convictions of listeners. Grounded Theory, on the other hand, aims to reconstruct the main concerns of the participants in the field.⁷⁹ Therefore, the research question focusses upon the conventional practice of ‘ordinary corporate worship’.⁸⁰ A theory of listening explains why and how the main concern of participants is

74. An important feature of this objection is the fact that specificity is usually connected with the theoretical framework of research: a sloppy theoretical framework results in a broad research question.

75. Cf. B. G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory. Issues and Discussions*. (Sociology Press, 1998), pp. 122–125.

76. See for an example, section 5.2.5.

77. Cf. J. A. van der Ven, ‘Die Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse’ in: J. A. van der Ven and H.-G. Ziebertz, editors, *Paradigmenentwicklung in der Praktischen Theologie*. Volume 13, (Kampen: Kok, 1993), p. 138.

78. Glaser, *Doing*, pp. 116–122.

79. See further section 11.1 on the listener and the problem of listening.

80. Cf. I. Lukatis, ‘Der ganz normale Gottesdienst in empirischer Sicht’. *Praktische Theologie*, 38 (2003):4, p. 356. See also R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith. Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 18–19.

resolved in the substantive area. Hence the main concern of the listener is the result rather than the starting point of reception research.

These considerations demonstrate how the conditions for formulating a proper research question and methodology are interdependent. If a broad research question is given with the proposed methodology, then what is Grounded Theory?

1.4.2 Grounded Theory Methodology

Started as the collaborative effort by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the late sixties of the previous century⁸¹, Grounded Theory is nowadays widely used among various disciplines, has acquired the status of 'standard method' for qualitative research in textbooks on methodology, provides general analytic procedures, and aims to produce theoretical statements about empirical data in such a way that these statements themselves reflect patterns in the data.⁸²

In the methodological fork between deductive and inductive research designs, Grounded Theory clearly takes an inductive stand: it formulates theoretical statements on the basis of data rather than approaching data from a preconceived set of theoretical statements. A deductive logic in which data are compared to existing theories differs from an inductive logic in which generalisations are based upon the comparison of a series of cases or incidents. Both strategies have their pros and cons. Against a deductive logic, Glaser and Strauss present a well-argued realist argument that theory should be based upon the reality of the data and not to be invented behind a desk or derived from well-established 'grand' theories in order not to miss the peculiarities of real life and to avoid a preconceived rendering of social reality.⁸³ Against the inductive logic, critics present an equally impressive hermeneutical argument: there are no facts without prior theoretical assumptions and to 'let the data speak' is a grossly naive view of research since observations are theoretically laden by implication.

Paradoxically, the hermeneutical critique of the inductive approach (no facts without theory) fuels the realist critique of the deductive approach (no theory without facts) and vice versa. In order to deal satisfactorily with this paradox, various attempts have been made either to dismiss Grounded Theory

81. B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

82. The method is widely used, in health studies (see references below), communication studies and theology, cf. T. R. Lindlof and B. C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. 2nd edition. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 218–222 and R. Brouwer, *Pastor tussen macht en onmacht. Een studie naar de professionalisering van het hervormde predikantschap*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995). For textbooks see e.g. Robson, *Real World Research*, pp. 190–193.

83. Glaser and Strauss, *Discovery*, pp. 10–15.

methodology entirely⁸⁴, to redefine it from a postmodern view on science⁸⁵, or to restate its insistence upon the existence of patterns in reality externally to the mind of the researcher.⁸⁶ Interpretivist, constructivist, and realist accounts are abundantly present in the ongoing methodological debate which remains very lively witnessing the recent explosion of publications in which Kathy Charmaz's textbook (2006), the collaborative *Handbook* (2007), the bilingual anthology (2007) and the proceedings of a gentle colloquium between second generation grounded theorists (2009) are particularly noteworthy.⁸⁷ These various methodological branches emerged from the public disagreement between Glaser and Strauss in the early nineties of the previous century.⁸⁸

Naturally, this study does not intend to settle these matters though a positive account and a critical evaluation of some of the methodological aspects are both useful and needed in order to put my research question in a broader methodological perspective.

The central concern of *generating theory* according to the procedures of Grounded Theory is 'conceptualisation', the naming of patterns in data that transcends 'time, place, and people' by generating categories and their properties from incidents of data.⁸⁹ Descriptions are always particularistic; concepts,

84. G. Thomas and D. James, 'Reinventing Grounded Theory: some questions about theory, ground and discovery.' *British Educational Research Journal*, 32 (2006):6.

85. A. E. Clarke, *Situational Analysis. Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005).

86. Barney Glaser in various publications, notably Glaser, *Doing*; B. G. Glaser and J. A. Holton, 'Remodeling Grounded Theory'. *Forum Qualitative Social Research. Online Journal* 5 (2004):2.

87. Respectively: K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Sage, 2006); Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K., editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007); Mey, G. and Mruck, K., editors, *Grounded Theory Reader. Historical Social Research Supplement*. (Köln: Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung, 2007); Morse, J. M. et al., editors, *Developing Grounded Theory. The Second Generation*. (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2009).

88. For the issues at stake, see B. G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis. Emergence vs Forcing*. (Sociology Press, 1992) in particular, and numerous secondary studies such as F. Myrick and D. Walker, 'Grounded Theory: An Exploration of Process and Procedure'. *Qualitative health research*, 16 (2006):4; H. Heath and S. Cowley, 'Developing a Grounded Theory Approach. A comparison of Glaser and Strauss'. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 41 (2004):2; D. L. Rennie, 'Grounded Theory Methodology: The Pressing Need for a Coherent Logic of Justification'. *Theory Psychology*, 8 (1998):1; J. E. B. Duchscher and D. Morgan, 'Grounded theory: reflections on the emergence vs. forcing debate'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48 Dec (2004):6. For a genealogy of the various approaches of Grounded Theory, see the diagram in Morse et al., *Developing Grounded Theory*, p. 17.

89. This paragraph is based upon B. G. Glaser, 'Conceptualization. On Theory and Theorizing Using Grounded Theory'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1 Retrieved August 2008 (2002):2 (URL: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm>). See also U. Kelle, 'The Development of Categories: Different Approaches in Grounded Theory'. in: K. Charmaz and A. Bryant, editors,

on the other hand, are abstract renderings of situations, practices or areas.⁹⁰ Concepts acquire a life beyond the data being studied; descriptions have a timely existence for as long as they remain accurate to the field. The abstract nature of concepts enables researchers and scholars to take the understanding of reality to a next level: from understanding data to understanding patterns in the data (categories), from categories to a central concern. Moving to a higher level, the main concern may also appear central in other areas. Descriptions cannot be taken into another area, concepts can.⁹¹ Take for instance the central concern in this study, actualising faith. Let us suppose that, in say, 30 years time there are no sermon listeners left except for tourists that visit churches like spectators visit theatrical performances. In that scenario, actualising faith is no longer a fitting category in which it once was generated, yet the concept itself and its 'enduring grab' remains.⁹² So actualising faith has a status on its own and may be a very relevant concept in other areas subsequently. Its properties, such as its 'dialectic orientation' in which faith is actualised eschatologically or in relation to the here-and-now⁹³, help to understand the various ways in which trust in God gives perspective beyond this life or provide comfort in times of trouble even if the original context in which the concept was developed no longer exists.

Theory provides (hypothetical) connections between concepts and properties. In other words, it has the ability to *integrate* concepts. It forms the third level of conceptualisation and moves from categories (open coding) to properties of categories (selective coding) and finally to relationships between categories and properties (theoretical coding).⁹⁴ Next, theoretical relationships also *explain* why certain patterns in the data are the way they are and hence predict whether particular phenomena are likely to occur or not. Thirdly, grounded theories do not intend to capture all possible concepts and properties except for those that emerge from the interaction with the data and that are relevant to integrate

The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory. (Sage Publications, 2007). – chapter 9.

90. Cf. also J. A. Holton, 'The Coding Process and Its Challenges'. in: K. Charmaz and A. Bryant, editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007). – chapter 13, pp. 272–274.

91. Glaser calls this phenomenon 'conceptual levels', see Glaser, *Doing*, pp. 135–139.

92. For 'enduring grab' see Glaser, 'Conceptualization', p. 16. Obviously, this is also a matter of ontology and as old as the metaphysical question whether and how universals exist. Concepts in the Glaserian sense seem to have an eternal life like universals have in classical metaphysics and contemporary realist phenomenology. For the latter see B. Smith, 'Realistic Phenomenology'. in: L. Embree et al., editors, *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997); B. Smith, 'Beyond Concepts. Ontology as Reality Representation'. in: A. Varzi and L. Vieu, editors, *Formal Ontology in Information Systems. Proceedings of the Third International Conference (FOIS 2004)*. (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2004).

93. Cf. section 10.3.

94. In the methodical part of this study I extensively deal with the various kinds of coding and their relative place in the process of theory-formation, see Chapter 4 and 5.

and explain the main concern in the field. Therefore, a well-formed theory is *parsimonious* in the sense that it includes only those variables and patterns that are relevant to the central concepts and thus prevents analysis from moving into accurate description.⁹⁵ Listening has an endless number of properties, but not all of them are relevant to explain the process of getting religiously involved, only those that have been included in the theory.

These features of theory formation help to understand what kind of practical theological theory is generated through empirical research: *an integrated, explanatory, and parsimonious conceptual rendering of a religious area*. The theory-praxis relationship is a pivotal yet complex topic in practical theological methodology.⁹⁶ Theory is used on the level of practical action as well as on the level of paradigmatic thinking.⁹⁷ Grounded Theory makes the useful distinction between formal and substantial theories. Formal theories raise the conceptual level of substantial theories, like paradigms constitute a more abstract level of theory compared to theories of specific practices. Substantial theories, on the other hand, aim to understand and to explain a particular religious practice. They function as theories of practice.⁹⁸ My theory on getting religiously involved in hearing sermons is precisely this: it provides a conceptual understanding and helps to explain listening behaviour.

Yet it is this combination of understanding and explanation that bothers Thomas and James in their critical review of Grounded Theory methodology.⁹⁹ Grounded Theory, they argue, combines two different connotations of theory: theory as inspiration/patterning on the one hand (theory as ‘thinking tool’) and theory as explanation/prediction on the other hand (theory as ‘something new about the social world and which can be proved or disproved by empirical investigation.’)¹⁰⁰ Following Gadamer and the hermeneutical tradition they base their criticism upon the assumption that natural scientific procedures cannot be applied in the humanities given the nature of social reality.¹⁰¹ Besides the fact that this critique also applies to quantitative approaches in the human sciences,

95. See further B. G. Glaser, *Conceptualization contrasted with Description. The Grounded Theory Perspective, volume 1*. (Sociology Press, 2001).

96. See further section 1.5.

97. See the models of Dingemans and De Ruijter. Cf. G. D. J. Dingemans, *Manieren van doen. Inleiding tot de studie van de praktische theologie*. (Kampen: Kok, 1996); K. de Ruijter, *Meewerken met God. Ontwerp van een gereformeerde praktische theologie*. (Kampen: Kok, 2005).

98. Cf. the distinction between ‘theory for practice’ and ‘theory of practice’, see H.-G. Ziebertz, ‘Empirical Methodology and Normativity’, in: J. A. van der Ven and M. Scherer-Rath, editors, *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 291–293.

99. Thomas and James, ‘Reinventing Grounded Theory’.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 774.

101. Kathy Charmaz addresses this issue when she distinguishes between positivist or objectivist and interpretative or constructivist forms of Grounded Theory. The former concerns explanation, the latter is about understanding. Cf. Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 125–132.

the gap between understanding and explanation is not as evident as it is posed here. With respect to Grounded Theory the aspect of patterning (theory as thinking tool or mapping an area) is located in the task of conceptualisation, formulating substantial categories and their properties. Yet this should not be conflated with the task of theoretical coding through which formal relationships between categories emerge and hypotheses are constructed. The task of theoretical coding is thus part of a larger process of explanation and prediction. In this respect, Barney Glaser subtly distinguishes between the proper use of theory and conceptual description. Theoretical coding, he argues, leads to a set of conceptual hypotheses while conceptual descriptions do not move further than naming patterns in the data and describing them.¹⁰² In other words, the problem surrounding 'theory' must be put into a methodical perspective: some research techniques produce understandings (substantial coding) while others generate explanations (theoretical coding).

This rejoinder does not imply that there are no problems with Grounded Theory. For instance, ever since the 1967 publication the language of 'discovery' has bothered many methodologists, just like Grounded Theory's inductive character.¹⁰³ Similarly, the *dictum* that theory is the product rather than the necessary starting point of research has worried many. Later I will show that Grounded Theory methods do not necessarily lead to inductivism because of their built-in deductive procedures like theoretical sampling and the criterium of modifyability that grounded theories are supposed to meet.¹⁰⁴

Further, the methodical virtue of 'staying open' has raised hermeneutical objections. Is 'staying open' possible, what about presuppositions, does Grounded Theory entail some kind of neutral objectivist epistemology, and how to account for bias and interpretation on the part of the researcher? Yet these objections do not sufficiently pay attention to the methodical checks and balances that the researcher encounters when he masters the required theoretical sensitivity to gather, compare and code incidents of data.¹⁰⁵ I agree with Rennie that the

102. Glaser, *Conceptualisation contrasted with Description*; B. G. Glaser, *Description's Remodelling of Grounded Theory Methodology. The Grounded Theory Perspective, volume 2*. (Sociology Press, 2003).

103. Concerning the language of discovery and emergence, alternatives like 'constructing' and 'developing' has been proposed to rid the methodology of its positivist rings, cf. Charmaz, *Constructing*; Morse et al., *Developing Grounded Theory*. In Chapter 4 I adopt a classic description of 'manufacturing theory' to stress the craft-side of research and to avoid the philosophical intricacies which are many.

104. See section 5.3.1. Others propose the logic of abduction to overcome the problem of purely inductive reasoning, see J. Reichertz, 'Abduction. The Logic of Discovery of Grounded Theory'. in: *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory* (Sage, 2007). – chapter 10. For the criterium of modifyability, see Glaser, *Doing*, p. 237, also B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity. Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. (Sociology Press, 1978), pp. 4–5.

105. Van der Ven's criticism of the inductive method does not address the issue of theoretical

hermeneutical objections are not conclusive, since Grounded Theory truly is a form of *methodical* hermeneutics:

[T]he human sciences, especially, are hermeneutical in virtue of their involving an interpreting subject addressing a self-interpreting referent. [...] The grounded theory method instantiates this hermeneutics more completely than do the more conventional, received approaches to method in the social sciences. Moreover, the method tends to reduce the danger of vicious circularity and the limitation to particularism characteristic of traditional hermeneutics.¹⁰⁶

Grounded Theory's general methodology—rather than its methods—has been the main topic of this section. Generating data through interviews, the nature and amount of data, analyses and the various research procedures are further dealt with in part II of this study.¹⁰⁷

1.5 PRACTICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: INTRADISCIPLINARITY AND NORMATIVITY IN PRACTICES

Though Jennifer Mason rightly states that a research-design should start with ontology¹⁰⁸, the nature of a practical-theological phenomenon is eventually addressed in this final section. What does make a study about sermon-listening a practical-theological study? Is it the fact that theologians are interested in sermons and listeners? It seems, however, that it is not sufficient for research to have an interest in religious groups, institutions and believers to qualify them as practical-theological. A communication scholar who is interested in preaching is not doing theology because of the specific interest in preaching. If so, the line between communication studies and theology would become very thin. For example, J.G.M. Sterk's study of sermon reception investigates how cognitive dissonance might explain differences in listening behaviour.¹⁰⁹ Its underlying theoretical framework though is thoroughly social-psychological. Hence, the mere fact that he studies listeners and sermons does not make his research

sampling nor do his hermeneutical comments appeal to the need for theoretical sensitivity on the part of the researcher which is at the heart of Grounded Theory methodology. Cf. van der Ven, 'Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse'.

106. Rennie, 'Grounded Theory Methodology', p. 111. See for a fuller development and application of Rennie's views on grounded theory as methodical hermeneutics, D. L. Rennie, 'Grounded Theory Methodology as Methodical Hermeneutics: Reconciling Realism and Relativism', *Theory Psychology*, 10 (2000):4; D. L. Rennie and K. D. Fergus, 'Embodied Categorizing in the Grounded Theory Method: Methodical Hermeneutics in Action', *Theory Psychology*, 16 (2006):4.

107. See in particular Chapter 4.

108. Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, pp. 14–16.

109. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders*, pp. 13–14.

practical-theological. Sermon reception has been studied from a variety of theoretical viewpoints: rhetoric¹¹⁰, reception-aesthetics¹¹¹, or speech-act theory¹¹². Worthwhile as these approaches are, in themselves they do not capture the religious phenomenon which is at stake in preaching and listening. Therefore the practice of listening needs a theological articulation of its object to qualify as object for practical-theology.

On the other hand, the religious quality of listening does not appear *outside* the social or the psychological. Practical theology as a discipline needs a model to understand the relationship between religious and social aspects in reality.¹¹³ The key to do so has been found in the idea of ‘interdisciplinarity’. Practical theology in that view is de cooperation between the disciplines of theology and social-sciences. The favourite idea is that of a ‘dialogue between fields’ (Richard Osmer).¹¹⁴

Interdisciplinarity, however, can be understood in a dual sense. Synchronically, interdisciplinarity is achieved in the combination of two ways of thinking *at the same time*. Theological and social categories are both employed to describe and explain a case. For example, the study of D. Van Deusen Hunsinger uses the Chalcedonian formula to combine a Barthian theological perspective and a reading of pastoral cases from the perspective of depth-psychology. The categories of sin and shame are neither separated nor confused but serve to build the bilingual competence of the pastor.¹¹⁵ In a more ‘diachronic’ version, interdisciplinarity consists of two subsequent movements. Often the social study precedes the theological reflection. Most interpretative or hermeneutical approaches follow this pattern. An example of this way of thinking is the hermeneutical approach of D. Browning.¹¹⁶ According to Browning, the cycle of research starts with

110. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners*, pp. 7–16.

111. Martin, ‘Predigt als “offenes Kunstwerk”?’ Cf. W. Engemann, ‘Predigt. V. Kommunikationstheoretisch und rezeptionsästhetisch’. in: H. D. Betz and J. Pesch, editors, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Volume 6, 4th edition. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

112. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören II*.

113. In section 4.4 I deal with the relation between the social and religious on the level of concepts. Cf. T. T. J. Pleizier, ‘De Waarheid is praktisch. Theologia Reformata tussen Woord en werkelijkheid’. *Theologia Reformata*, 2 (2008), pp. 138–142, see also T. T. J. Pleizier and H. Schaap-Jonker, ‘Gereformeerde praktische theologie, een methodologische aanzet’. *Theologia Reformata*, 52 (2009):4, Section 4.

114. Van der Ven distinguishes between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, see J. A. van der Ven, *Practical Theology. An Empirical Approach*. (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), pp. 93–100. Richard Osmer speaks about crossdisciplinarity, R. R. Osmer, *Practical Theology. An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 222. Cf. R. R. Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), pp. 307–308.

115. van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology & Pastoral Counseling*.

116. D. S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and strategic proposals*.

social scientific descriptions and terminates in theological reflection. Theology is not part of the actual empirical study, but has a normative function *afterwards*. Similarly, according to Richard Osmer, normative reflection follows the 'practical theological interpretation'.¹¹⁷ Both versions of interdisciplinarity, however, are rather problematic. First, the synchronic model does indeed respect the distinct perspectives of theology and social science yet does not solve the issue of incommensurability: they remain conceptually unconnected and ultimately they cannot be compared.¹¹⁸ Metaphors, like that of 'dual natures' derived from the doctrine of incarnation, are employed to bridge the conceptual gap. Second, the diachronic model is able to give the different categories their own respective place; each performing their own task in analysis (Osmer). But the model begs the question whether theology itself should have an empirical orientation since it gives theology a paradigmatic or normative role to reflect upon social-scientific findings.¹¹⁹

Alternatively, Van der Ven presents a model of *intra*-disciplinarity.

The intradisciplinary model requires that *theology itself becomes empirical*, that is that it expands its traditional range of instruments, consisting of literary-historical and systematical methods and techniques, in the direction of an empirical methodology. This expansion can be described by the term intradisciplinarity which in the general epistemological sense refers to the borrowing of concepts, methods and techniques of one science by another and the integration of these elements into the other science.¹²⁰

The significance of Van der Ven's model lies in the fact that the empirical methodology and reflection are an integral part of the theological enterprise. The various approaches to interdisciplinarity lack the consistency of Van der Ven's model of intradisciplinarity in which empirical concepts become integrated in theological discourse to that extent that theological concepts direct research in all phases of the empirical-cycle.¹²¹ Van der Ven's insistence of theology becoming empirical permanently shaped the subsequent developments in practical theology.

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

117. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 4. Osmer is not very clear here, since, at other places, he suggests a synchronic understanding of interdisciplinarity, see Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, p. 304–305.

118. On incommensurability, see Audi, R., editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 364.

119. De Ruijter distinguishes between a social-scientific and a theological 'paradigm'. His model is clearly diachronic, see de Ruijter, *Meewerken met God*, pp. 117–120. Cf. his statement that 'an interdisciplinary method implies that empirical observations become connected with theological insights' (p. 123) but how this works out methodologically remains unclear.

120. van der Ven, *Practical Theology*, p. 101. *Emphasis mine*.

121. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 112–118.

In Van der Ven's model the possibility of intradisciplinarity relies foremost on the *testability* of theological concepts on the basis of empirical measurements.¹²² Alternatively, intradisciplinarity also relies on *conceptual integration*, as Grounded Theory aims for.¹²³ According to Van der Ven, the task of empirical theology is to test the adequacy and relevancy of theological reconstructions. Conceptual integration, on the other hand, serves another goal for empirical research though it shares the interest in psychological, communicative and social processes in the real world. Its task is to capture conceptually the religious reality which is supposedly present in these 'real' processes.¹²⁴ The social and the religious features of these processes are indeed distinct but an intradisciplinary perspective attempts to do justice to the fact that they denote nonetheless aspects or dimensions of one particular phenomenon. The whole of a phenomenon is larger than its parts.¹²⁵

The synchronic model of interdisciplinarity might object that this entails 'confusion' of different categories. This does not hold, however, since aspects or dimensions (or whatever 'theoretical code' is used) do not confuse categories but point to different properties within a category.¹²⁶ Precisely the synchronic model of interdisciplinarity itself confuses discourses. For instance, in her approach to pastoral care Van Deusen Hunsinger employs concepts that have been created specifically to articulate the mystery of Christ's two natures yet she applies them to an entirely different realm.¹²⁷ This is highly problematic because it suggests that the relation of Christ's two natures is analogical to other phenomena. Of course, the analogy with christology must be understood metaphorically. But as metaphor it does not explain anything contrary to the original explanatory intention. Intradisciplinarity, however, can overcome this problem because its theoretical power lies in relating different substantial categories by means of theoretical codes. For example, 'identifying with the sermon' is a socio-psychological process on the part of the listener, yet it functions as dimension of 'actualising faith', the latter being a religious idea.¹²⁸ The social and the religious conceptually relate through the 'dimension' code. Chapter 4 discusses this in more detail.

122. van der Ven, *Practical Theology*, p. 110.

123. See further, Chapter 5. Also above, section 1.5.

124. See F. G. Immink and T. T. J. Pleizier, 'Research in Homiletics' in: A. Grözinger and K. Ho Soon, editors, *Preaching as Shaping Experience in a World of Conflict*. Volume 5, (Singapore, 2005), p. 88.

125. Contemporary realist phenomenology addresses the ontological implications of this idea of 'parts and wholes'. See Smith, B., editor, *Parts and Moments. Studies in logic and formal ontology*. (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1982). This moves beyond the scope of this study though.

126. For theoretical coding, see section 4.3.2 and 5.4. Cf. Glaser, *Theoretical Coding*.

127. van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology & Pastoral Counseling*.

128. For identification, see Chapter 9; for actualising faith, see Chapter 10.

Van der Ven places his intradisciplinary model within a larger normative hermeneutic-communicative and eschatological framework that entails notions like freedom, equality, universality and solidarity. The symbol of the eschatological Kingdom inspires, orientates and motivates the religious praxis.¹²⁹ This normative framework of hermeneutical-communicative action functions in Van der Ven's approach as 'object, goal, and condition of empirical-theological research'.¹³⁰ So the practice under reconstruction is defined in terms of the hermeneutical-communicative and eschatological ideals. Likewise, research aims to further the cause of freedom, equality and solidarity and to promote 'human flourishing'.¹³¹ The practice is studied from a normative perspective that lies *outside* the practice.

Theory formation as I have outlined above considers normativity as a necessary structure of the practice itself. Every practice is governed by constitutive beliefs, rules for conduct, and normative convictions concerning right action. Practices are shaped by beliefs and vice versa. Miroslav Volf puts it like this: 'Christian practices are *by definition* normatively shaped by Christian beliefs. [...] Christian beliefs *as beliefs* entail practical commitments'.¹³² Similarly, Robert Craig understands practice more generally as 'a coherent set of activities that are commonly engaged in, and meaningful in particular ways, among people familiar with a certain culture'—a definition he further explains that

[p]ractices involve not only engaging in certain activities but also thinking and talking about those activities in particular ways. Practices have a *normative*—sometimes, even, an *artistic*—aspect. They can be done well or badly, and people tend to evaluate the conduct of practices in which they participate or take an interest. By the same token, practices also have a *conceptual*—sometimes, even, a *theoretical*—aspect. [...] In short, as a practice develops, a normative discourse about the practice develops along with it.¹³³

Consequently, the goal of practical theological research moves into the direction of the reconstruction and conceptualisation of these normative beliefs and inhering structures of practices.

Ultimately, 'religion is not explained in terms of social cohesion or psychological development [but] from the point of view of its intrinsic meaning'.¹³⁴

129. van der Ven, *Practical Theology*, p. 74.

130. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

131. J. A. van der Ven, 'An Empirical or a Normative Approach to Practical-Theological Research. A False Dilemma' in: J. A. van der Ven and M. Scherer-Rath, editors, *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 102–103.

132. Volf, 'Way of Life', pp. 251, 253.

133. R. T. Craig, 'Communication as a Practice' in: G. J. Shepherd, J. S. John and T. Striphas, editors, *Communication as... Perspectives on Theology*. (Sage Publications, Inc, 2005), p. 38–39.

134. Immink, *Faith*, p. 181.

Then the issue at stake is primarily the reconstruction of the intrinsic meaning of religion in the various practices in which religion is exercised.¹³⁵ Hence, the chief aim of practical theological research is to reconstruct positively and critically the inherent normativity, the convictions, values, activities that denote the practice as religious practice. Ziebertz puts it eloquently when he writes that '[b]y reflecting, classifying and describing in theoretical terms the everyday practice of religion, it is partaking in the universe of discourse in which an understanding emerges of what religion, the church and faith actually are.'¹³⁶

This detour on intradisciplinarity and practices helps to focus the practical theological 'object' for this study. From a protestant understanding, listening and preaching are primary practices in which the divine-human interaction takes shape. The biblical evidence for the relation between preaching, listening and faith is usually found in St. Paul's letter to the Romans, 'faith comes from hearing' (Rom 10: 17).

Paul's statement models the fundamental relatedness of preaching and the divine-human relationship through faith. Individual and communal faith is created, maintained and shaped by the proclamation of the gospel. Hence the protestant confessional literature asserts that the Divine word in preaching must be received by the community of faith (*a fidelibus recipi*).¹³⁷ The specific Reformed contribution to the practice of faith is its continual grounding into the Word of God and the protestant contention is that preaching has the proclamation of the gospel and the exposition of the Scriptures at its center. In the Reformation preaching took over the function of the eucharist.¹³⁸ It acquired sacramental quality¹³⁹ though sacramental language in protestant theology became reserved for Baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹⁴⁰ In fact, preaching God's Word is the primary means for establishing and maintaining the relationship with

135. Also sociologists of religion nowadays do not reduce religion to its mere interhuman dimensions. Though divine beings are not empirically verifiable, sociological definitions of religion include metaphysical references. See for instance Platvoet's definition of religion in J. Platvoet, 'The Definers Defined. Traditions in the Definition of Religion.' *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2 (1990):2, p. 195. Cf. also Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, pp. 29–30.

136. Ziebertz, 'Empirical Methodology and Normativity', p. 290.

137. H. Bullinger, 'Confessio Helvetica Posterior (A.D. 1566). The Second Helvetic Confession'. in: P. Schaff, editor, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds. With translations*. Volume III, Reprinted 1998 edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1931), p. 237.

138. H. A. Oberman, 'Preaching and the Word in the Reformation'. *Theology Today*, 18 (1961):1.

139. Since Vatican II, Roman-Catholic homiletics also speaks about a 'sacramental' quality of preaching, see O. Fuchs, 'Predigt. III. Konfessionell. 1. Katholisch'. in: H. D. Betz and J. Pesch, editors, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Volume 6, 4th edition. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

140. See for instance, H. O. Old, *Worship. Reformed according to Scripture*. Revised and expanded edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

God in faith. Theologically speaking, faith consists of ‘a concrete involvement, interaction, and communion—words that point to a dynamic relationship.’¹⁴¹ The church is the visible reality in which this relationship becomes apparent and the practices of the church are therefore important sources for the study of faith as part of the real world.¹⁴²

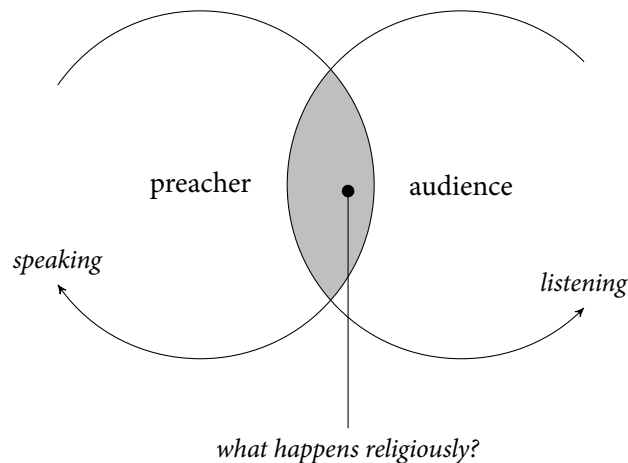


Figure 1.1 Substantive area of research

This religious conviction concerning the practice of sermon-listening guides our study of the practice of listening. Reconstructing the perspectives of the actors in the field, the listeners themselves, helps us to understand what happens when people listen to a sermon and what theoretical properties the practicing of faith has in ‘real listening.’¹⁴³ In part III of this study I demonstrate that, according to listeners, hearing sermons is ‘religion in action’ as it occurs in the three stages of opening up, dwelling in the sermon and actualising faith. So a practical-theological perspective takes seriously the set of beliefs, the religious experiences, and practices of faith of participants in the field. It shares this respect for the participants in the field with other disciplines, because research is

141. Immink, *Faith*, pp. 268–269.

142. A. E. McGrath, *The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), Ch. 10.

143. Actually, the actor-perspective is a concept in interpretivist and symbolic-interactionist research designs. In order to meet the requirement for a theory to be relevant for the main concerns of participant in the area of research, its usage extends the paradigms it originates from. See for the actor-perspective in research, F. Wester, *Strategieën voor kwalitatief onderzoek*. 3rd edition. (Bussum: Coutinho, 1995), pp. 25–29 and V. Frissen and F. Wester, ‘Recente toepassingen van de interpretatieve onderzoeksbenadering in de communicatiewetenschap.’ *Massacommunicatie*, 18 (1990):2. For the requirement of ‘relevance’ for grounded theory studies, see Glaser, *Doing*, p. 18.

a ‘concerted effort to learn about their views and actions and to try to understand their lives from their perspectives’¹⁴⁴.

In the field of faith, the primary interest for practical-theology is to find out how the dynamic relationship with God is exercised and practiced among believers, in and through the various exercises and activities of Christian faith among which is listening to preaching.¹⁴⁵ This study is located in this broader practical theological programme. In order to focus on how the dynamics between believers and God is embedded in the practice of listening two concepts are central in sensitizing the substantive area: *homiletic interaction* and the *divine-human dynamics*. They constitute the field of faith and are somewhat hidden in the overlap between preacher and audience as figure 1.1 suggests. The next part of this study intends to define this field of hearing sermons, explore its religious and social dimensions, and demarcate the area of research in which Grounded Theory is generated.

144. Charmaz, *Constructing*, p. 19.

145. Immink, *Faith*, pp. 119–120.

PART I

The Substantive Area

2

HOMILETIC INTERACTION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preaching event there is a ‘salvation constituting dialectic of Word and faith.’¹ This dialectic of Word and faith represents the Reformation view on preaching. Martin Luther for example states that ‘The divine Word creates ‘internal’ faith but not without a sensorical, observable ‘external’ word.’ The homiletic trinity of (external) Word, (internal activity of the) Spirit and faith is characteristic for a Protestant understanding of the preaching event. On the one hand rhetoric and the Spirit go together,² on the side of the hearer the faithful apprehension of the gospel is vital.³ To put it differently, the divine Word and interhuman discourse together determine what goes on in preaching. Preaching is thus an instance of both religious and human communication. This dual nature of preaching is the pivotal problem of homiletics.⁴ This chapter explores some of the social aspects of preaching. In the next chapter we examine

1. J. Hermelink, ‘Predigt. III. Konfessionell. 3. Evangelisch.’ in: H. D. Betz and J. Pesch, editors, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Volume 6, 4th edition. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

2. J. Rothermundt, *Der Heilige Geist und die Rhetorik. Theologische Grundlinien einer empirischen Homiletik*. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984).

3. For the role of faith in the preaching event according to the Reformation, see H. A. Oberman, ‘Preaching and the Word in the Reformation.’ *Theology Today*, 18 (1961):1.

4. See M. Josuttis, ‘Verkündigung als kommunikatives und kreatorisches Geschehen.’ in: *Homiletik und Rhetorik in der Predigtarbeit. Homiletische Studien* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1985); K. Runia, ‘De prediking van de kerk.’ in: W. van ’t Spijker et al., editors, *De kerk. Wezen, weg en werk van de kerk naar reformatorische opvatting*. (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1990); M. Den Dulk, *Heren van de praxis. Karl Barth en de praktische theologie*. (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1996) It is also characteristic for other practical-theological phenomena such as liturgy, see F. G. Immink, ‘Een dubbele beweging.’ in: P. Oskamp and N. Schuman, editors, *De weg van de liturgie. Tradities, achtergronden, praktijk*. (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 1998); religious education; pastoral care, community formation etc. The anthropological and theological aspects of preaching are dealt with by the Dutch theologian H. Jonker, *En tòch preken*. (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1973),

sermon reception as an act of faith on the part of the listeners in terms of various divine-human dynamics.

Since the amount of definitions of the term ‘preaching’ is numerous, it does not seem very helpful to add another definition to the list. Therefore, with the concept *homiletic interaction* I introduce a term that helps to focus on a single aspect of the preaching event that serves the purpose of this study while avoiding a superfluous discussion. Homiletic interaction concerns the social-psychological aspect of preaching, the communication between preacher and audience. Besides the pragmatic consideration to keep the discussion as relevant as possible, several other reasons support the introduction of a single term rather than adding a next definition to the already extensive list of preaching definitions.⁵

First, I need a descriptive rather than a normative definition of preaching. Normative definitions of preaching define preaching from either a particular theological tradition or a communicative perspective. These definitions function as criteria to normatively assess the practice of preaching and contain implicit or explicit conditions for evaluation. The practice of preaching then is evaluated

pp. 44–68 This duality accounts for the host of different definitions of preaching, according to Ulrich Nembach, since either Word or man is primary in a definition of preaching, see U. Nembach, *Predigen heute. Ein Handbuch*. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), p. 130. Bundschuh-Schramm talks about ‘ein ineinander von religiöser Sprache und lebensweltliche Sprachen’, see C. Bundschuh-Schramm, ‘Konkretion: Predigt’ in: H. Haslinger et al., editors, *Handbuch Praktische Theologie. Band 2. Durchführungen*. (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 2000), p. 439; Fuchs speaks about ‘ein Doppelstruktur’, namely the interhuman encounter and the encounter of God and human beings, see O. Fuchs, ‘Verkündigung’ in: H. Haslinger et al., editors, *Handbuch Praktische Theologie. Band 2. Durchführungen*. (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 2000), p. 428. See further, section 4.4.

5. See for definitions K. Barth, *Homiletics. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991); R. Bohren, ‘Zur Definition der Predigt’ in: W. Dantine and K. Lüthi, editors, *Theologie zwischen Gestern und Morgen. Interpretationen und Anfragen zum Werk Karl Barths*. (München: Kaiser, 1968); J. Henkys, ‘Ansätze des Predigtverständnisses’ in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990). The German homiletician Rudolf Bohren refuses to give a definition of preaching because none of the contemporary definitions reach the succinct density of the Reformed confessional statement ‘*praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*’. It is impossible to define preaching, because the divine Word is not only eternal, but also infinite and endless. To define is to restrict. A miracle, as Bohren has described the preaching event, should not be canalized by a definition, see R. Bohren, *Predigtlehre*. 6th edition. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1993), pp. 48–52. See also Bohren, ‘Definition’. An extensive discussion of preaching-definitions can be very instructive though is not very relevant to this study. Ulrich Nembach introduces a series of definitions of preaching and provides four relevant angles to construct a definition for the event of preaching: situation, rhetoric, language, psychology of the preacher, and the congregational practice. See Nembach, *Predigen heute*, pp. 124–134. Among the sermon definitions, this one is rather entertaining: ‘a sermon is a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes’ (White) cited by K. Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), p. 10.

according to the conditions implied or explicitly stated in the definition, such as theological soundness or communicative effectiveness. Descriptive definitions, however, focus upon the actual phenomenon without requiring a particular theological or communicative standard. A descriptive definition does not contain evaluative conditions and focusses research upon the phenomenon that is being studied. Empirical homiletics needs a descriptive definition of preaching to study actual preaching practices before embarking on the question what kind of preaching is theologically and communicatively desirable. Homiletic interaction serves this descriptive aim sufficiently and focusses on certain aspects of instances of interhuman communication that are commonly called 'preaching'.

The second reason for not introducing a particular definition of preaching depends on the nature of preaching. Preaching is attributed to speakers (viz. preachers or ministers), rather than to hearers.⁶ Recently attempts have been made in homiletics to speak about the hearer as preacher.⁷ Those redefinitions of preaching, however, do not sufficiently clarify the distinction between speaking and hearing if both activities are called 'preaching'. Like speaking, preaching includes the participation of an audience. Uttering sentences in an empty church would not count as preaching. The turn to the listener in homiletics correctly placed the participation of hearers on the agenda, but it is conceptually confusing to label audience activity as preaching, because speaking and hearing remain distinct acts. Homiletic interaction avoids this problem by focussing upon the interaction between speaker and hearer in the setting of preaching.

Finally, the term 'homiletic interaction' concentrates upon a phenomenon that is not fully captured with the general notion 'preaching' despite the attempts of redefining or broadening it. Homiletic interaction entails communicative and theological dimensions and integrates speaking and hearing as parts of a larger whole. Simply put, preaching is what a preacher does; homiletic interaction is what preacher and hearer do together and is open to what might happen religiously in this social activity.⁸ Here, homiletic interaction differs from other settings of communication that may be explained in religious terms but are

6. Cf. 'Preaching is the proclamation of God's message by a chosen personality to meet the needs of humanity.' See, J. A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons. Fourth Edition. Revised by Vernon L. Stanfield.* (New York: Harper Collins, 1979), p. 3.

7. See for instance W. Engemann, *Die Verkündigung als transaktionales Ereignis zwischen Prediger und Hörer.* (Rostock: Wilhelm-Pieck Universität, 1985); C. Möller, 'Der Hörer als zweiter Prediger. Zur Bedeutung der Rezeptionsästhetik für die Homiletik.' in: R. Ehmman, editor, *Predigen aus Leidenschaft. Homiletische Beiträge für Rudolf Bohren zum 75. Geburtstag.* (Karlsruhe: Verl. Evang. Presseverb. Für Baden, 1996).

8. Werner Jetter suggests that what preacher and hearer do as a corporate act resembles the phenomenon of conversation. I will come back to this idea in section 2.4.2, which deals with shared intentionality (see below).

not designed to do so.⁹ So briefly stated, homiletic interaction is a form of interhuman communication by means of a monologue in the setting of Christian worship through which God reaches out with his grace and fellowships with his people.¹⁰ This statement is further analysed below. Section 2.3 further deals with the idea of interhuman communication and section 2.4 discusses four initial or sensitizing aspects of homiletic interaction: social act, discourse, shared intentionality and active listening.

Probably the current tendency in homiletics to speak about the preaching event rather than the act of preaching comes close to my understanding of homiletic interaction. Yet for different reasons, partly explained above, it seems better to start with a fresh concept. The idea of homiletic interaction better articulates an empirical situation, namely a kind of social interaction that takes place when one person speaks (preaches) and others listen, a kind of situation that belongs to the branch of theology called 'homiletics'. Further, it has been observed that homiletics has become a fragmented field of study.¹¹ So a reconstruction of the field may be stimulated by the use of new concepts that integrate various fragments. 'New', however, is relative, for the concept of interaction has found its way in homiletics since a couple of decades. For example, Ingo Reuter captures Dannowski's and Luther's conceptions under the heading of 'interaction'.¹² Finally, the tendency in homiletical literature to change from act to event-language does not do justice to the fact that preaching in fact is an 'act', namely of the preacher. Preaching and listening together create an area in which something is expected to happen; hence the notion of 'event' does not disqualify the use of 'the act of preaching' yet introduces another slice of reality that is worth researching.

Preaching entails an interhuman communicative practice as well as a religious phenomenon. Therefore we need two notions in order to distinguish between the interhuman and the divine-human. In this chapter I give a brief overview of the basic aspects of the interhuman dimension. The next chapter

9. Cf. Q. J. Schultze, 'The 'God-problem' in Communication studies'. *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 28 (2005):1.

10. F. G. Immink, 'De reformatorisches preek'. in: M. Barnard and P. Post, editors, *Ritueel bestek. Antropologische kernwoorden van de liturgie*. (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001), p. 228.

11. See F. G. Immink, 'Homiletics. The Current Debate'. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 8 (2004).

12. See I. Reuter, *Predigt Verstehen. Grundlagen einer homiletischen Hermeneutik*. Volume 17, Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), pp. 98–103. See further K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören. Band II. Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hörern. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*. (München: Kaiser, 1982), *Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung*; H. Luther, 'Predigt als Handlung. Überlegungen zur Pragmatik des Predigens'. *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 80 (1983); H. W. Dannowski, *Kompodium der Predigtlehre*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985).

addresses several aspects of the divine-human dynamics as they occur in the various strands of homiletical literature. These two dimensions, however, are closely and almost irreducibly connected. In the classic definition of preaching as ‘means of grace’¹³ human speech is instrumental to communicate the gracious condence of God.¹⁴ Christian-Erdmann Schott takes up this Reformed startingpoint in his proposal in order

to found preaching on God’s will and acts of salvation (*Heilswillen und -handeln*) and hence to understand preaching as a means (*ein Medium*) through which God continues his work today when it is proclaimed.¹⁵

The term ‘homiletic interaction’ thus puts human communication in the perspective of a socio-religious system.¹⁶ Before dealing with some of its aspects I present a general discussion of the term ‘preaching’ to show how both inter-human and religious aspects permeate the substantive area in which empirical research takes place.

2.2 WHAT IS PREACHING?

Dialectic theology and the kerugmatic approach to preaching insist upon the idea that in its essence preaching cannot be organized. Preaching happens.¹⁷ It cannot be planned. This happening should not be confused with the uttering of sentences and words on the part of the speaker, nor with a sophisticated interpretation of what a speaker has said on the part of the audience. Homiletics generally agree that the preaching event is not merely a human social act of speaking and listening, but that in the preaching moment God somehow is actively present. God speaks and interacts with his people. Or as the German practical-theologian Manfred Josuttis puts it: preaching is a creative act of God in the present.¹⁸

As a creative divine act preaching is essentially tied up with interhuman discourse though. Preaching is not like God’s creative speech as the beginning

13. R. A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms. Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 187–188.

14. See for the concept of divine condence in a theological theory of communication, M. Piennisch, *Kommunikation und Gottesdienst. Grundlinien göttlicher Zuwendung in Bibel und Verkündigung*. (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hansler-Verlag, 1995).

15. C.-E. Schott, *Predigtgeschichte als Zugang zur Predigt*. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1986), p. 135.

16. Mortenson distinguishes between intrapersonal, interpersonal and sociocultural systems of human interaction in communication, see C. D. Mortensen, *Communication. The study of human interaction*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972).

17. See for instance, K. Miskotte, *Het waagstuk der prediking*. (Den Haag: Daamen, 1941); K. Runia, ‘What is Preaching according to the New Testament?’ *Tyndale Bulletin*, 29 (1978).

18. Josuttis, ‘Verkündigung’.

of the book of Genesis tells us. If so, the social practice of interhuman communication is unnecessary in the preaching event. If preaching would be a sole act of God, then it could occur in situations without any interhuman exchange of meaning.¹⁹ Christians believe that God may address human beings immediately, for instance in meditating, dreaming or praying. Protestants, however, would hastily qualify this statement that God regularly does so in close connection with his Word as recorded in the canonical Scriptures of Old and New Testament.²⁰ Preaching is an event in which interhuman discourse and divine discourse are bound together in a complex act of communication. When we try to understand the complexity of preaching we have to entangle the different parts of this complex whole of intertwined theology and communication. Hence I distinguish between four elements: the speaker, the hearer, their interaction²¹ and the context of discourse.²²

First, the question is whether the *speaker* is convinced that God uses his speech to address someone else. If the speaker is not consciously acting to connect her audience with God, we do not use the term 'preaching' to explain the communicative situation the speaker participates in. The proclamation of the Church, as Karl Barth puts it, is surrounded with expectation.²³ This expectation begins with the speaker himself. Closing the reading from the Scriptures in the liturgy with the utterance 'This is the Word of the Lord' does not merely apply to the Scriptural text but also expresses the expectation that through preaching this Word the living voice of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*) sounds. In preaching the speaker intends to connect the audience with God and for the discourse to function accordingly the speaker purposively mentions God in her speech. Hence the human speech of the preacher has to do with naming God. Like the

19. Johnson has described different modes of what he calls 'GodSpeech'. See B. C. Johnson, *The God Who Speaks. Listening to the Language of God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

20. Classic Reformed theology distinguishes between immediate speaking of God and mediate speaking of God. Preaching is a species of the latter. See R. A. Muller, *Holy Scripture. The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*. 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), pp. 195–205. For a philosophical account of a speaking God, see N. Wolterstorff, *Divine discourse. Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1995).

21. More common analysis of communication events have the factor 'message' instead of 'interaction'. In an interactive framework, however, a message is not a package of signs or codes, but it is created in the communion of speaking and hearing.

22. This section assumes an ontological commitment towards the part/whole theory as for instance, in the work of contemporary realist phenomenologists such as Barry Smith, Kevin Mulligan and the philosopher Karl Schumann. Cf. Smith, B., editor, *Parts and Moments. Studies in logic and formal ontology*. (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1982). A detailed discussion of this theory goes beyond the boundaries of this study. See for more thoughts on ontological analysis as part of the empirical cycle, section 4.4.

23. K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/1. Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatik*. (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1975), p. 89.

original etymology of preaching refers to an act of predication, preaching is ‘*praedicatio*’ because it affirms something of God and of God’s promises.²⁴ When a speaker is aware of the fact that God acts in relation to the audience, then the speaker consciously and intentionally mentions God or, simply, talks about God.

Hence the first property of the complex of interhuman discourse and divine agency entails that in the preaching event God is ‘named’²⁵, God’s promise of salvation is narratively represented²⁶ or the presence of Christ is articulated in various ways ranging from symbolic expressions to realistic references.²⁷ In Christian preaching religious language functions christologically in articulating the symbols and realities of the historical Jesus, the Spiritual presence of Christ in the now, and his future reign. Though the presence of God in Christ may be articulated in sermons from various theological perspectives, it belongs to the basic background convictions of preachers that in preaching an extra-human, transcendental dynamic is operative.²⁸

Second, we consider the preaching event from the perspective of the *convictions of the audience*. Werner Jetter insists that ‘the sermon is an expected word’, not only from the part of the speaker, but also from the part of the hearer.²⁹ So in an ordinary worship service ordinary churchgoers have expectations that go beyond mere entertainment or instruction. Hearers are hearers of the Word, read and preached. The expectation of a listener to a sermon differs from the expectation of someone who attends a lecture or visits the theatre. A sermon may be studied or read in view of various purposes yet the setting of worship creates expectations that come with a different mindset that, to some degree, includes the fact that the audience is faithfully expecting a Word from God.³⁰ In the

24. Muller, *Dictionary*, p. 236.

25. Cf. F. G. Immink, ‘Human Discourse and the Act of Preaching’, in: C. Hermans et al., editors, *Social Constructionism and Theology*. Volume 7, (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002); Immink, ‘International Journal of Practical Theology’, vol. 8, 2004’. On preaching as naming God (*Namenrede*) see also J. Nierop, *Die Gestalt der Predigt im Kraftfeld des Geistes. Eine Studie zu Form und Sprache der Predigt nach Rudolf Bohrens Predigtlehre*. (Zürich / Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 105–124.

26. R. F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology. The Gospel as Narrated Promise*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

27. David Buttrick mentions the symbolic presence of Christ, see his D. G. Buttrick, *Homiletic. Moves and Structures*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); DeVries compared the Schleiermacherian and Calvinian views of the presence of Christ in preaching as incarnational and sacramental respectively. See D. DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 10, note 2.

28. See further Chapter 3.

29. ‘Die Predigt ist ein erwartenes Wort.’ (W. Jetter, ‘Die Predigt als Gespräch mit dem Hörer’, in: A. Beutel, editor, *Homiletisches Lesebuch: Texte zur heutigen Predigtlehre*. (Tübingen: Katzmann, 1989), p. 208).

30. This may be different for evangelistic preaching outside the congregational setting.

setting of ordinary congregational worship religious attitudes and expectations frame the listening experience.

Thirdly, we focus our attention upon the *relation between preacher and audience* in the preaching event, since 'both preacher and people know that the Lord is present among them, and addresses them through his Word.'³¹ Obviously, the preacher speaks and the audience is silent in listening, but as St. Augustin observed in the first homiletical treatise ever, the act of speaking is incomplete without an act of understanding. Properly speaking, we do not talk about speaking if there is no understanding, according to St. Augustin.³² Likewise in preaching there is no speaking if there is no listening. Speaking and listening together create the preaching event. The British philosopher Austin is credited for inventing 'speech act theory'.³³ Austin explains understanding in terms of 'uptake'. An act of speech needs 'uptake' for its completion:

An effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out. [...] Generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of uptake.³⁴

Therefore, the interhuman interaction between speaker and hearer create a social practice. As a social practice preaching thus incorporates both speaking and hearing. Speaking and hearing is done by separate individuals, nonetheless the act of preaching is a communal, interactive event. This general idea is at the heart of what homiletical interaction is about: a co-operation between speaker and listener in the preaching event. In the empirical part of this study I particularly focus on the part of the listener and his role in the social act of preaching.

31. E. P. Clowney, *The Church*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), Contours of Christian theology, p. 130.

32. Augustin, *On Christian Doctrine. In Four Books*. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) (URL: <http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/doctrine/>), book IV.

33. Historically, speech act theory is already present in the work of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid and the Austrian phenomenologist Adolf Reinach, see Mulligan, K., editor, *Speech Act and Sachverhalt. Reinach and the Foundations of Realist Phenomenology*. (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff bv, 1987). Further developed by John Searle, speech-act theory was used for a more general framework to explain the construction of social realities, see his J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An essay in the philosophy of language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. (London: Penguin Books, 1995); J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society : philosophy in the real world*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998). See for a recent and comprehensive introduction in speech act theory, W. P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*. (Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 26–32.

34. J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, 2nd edition. (Oxford Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1975), The William James lectures ; 1955, p. 117.

Finally, I consider preaching in relation to *other social practices in church with a religious intention*, such as pastoral care, catechetical instruction, corporate prayer, confession, or blessing a group of people.³⁵ The particularity of preaching is due to the situation of discourse. First, preaching is a public address³⁶ and thus an instance of one-to-many speech. Preaching therefore resembles the speech situation of the direct mode of face-to-face mass-communication.³⁷ Second, preaching takes place in the setting of congregational worship, namely that part that follows or is connected with the reading of the Scriptures.³⁸ So the discourse of preaching is closely connected with the understanding of the normative texts of Christianity.³⁹

2.3 INTERHUMAN COMMUNICATION?

When considered religiously, preaching is an event in which the living voice of the gospel is heard. To put it differently, preaching is a situation in which communication between God and human beings happens. Bold as it may seem it is yet a central claim in all Christian theology throughout the history of homiletics.⁴⁰ Empirically, however, interhuman communication comes first. It is *in* or *through* the exchange of signs and symbols in language that the divine-human communion occurs. Theology talks about ‘mediating practices’⁴¹ that indicate at least an empirical order in which the social practice comes first.

35. Even non-linguistic acts count as connecting people with God, for rituals like laying on hands, anointing, the breaking of bread, the baptismal act. For the sacramental speech-act, see A. Martinich, ‘Sacraments and Speech Acts I and II’, *The Heythrop Journal. A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology*, XVI (1975).

36. F. G. Immink, ‘De prediking als openbare rede’, in: T. Boer, editor, *Schepper naast God? Theologie, bio-ethiek en pluralisme. Essays aangeboden aan Egbert Schroten*. (Assen, 2004). Also F. G. Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 273–278.

37. Indirect or mediate modes of mass-communication place artificial devices between the sender and the receiver, such as newspapers, radio, and television. Direct or immediate modes of mass-communication are face-to-face, such as a lecture in the college’s lecture room. For mass-communication theories, see D. McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*. 4th edition. (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

38. Cf. C. McSpadden, ‘Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Post-Christendom Church’, in: E. F. Davis and R. B. Hays, editors, *The Art of Reading Scripture*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

39. This has made homiletics very much text-oriented, such as in R. Zerfass, *Grundkurs Predigt. Textpredigt*. (1987) edition. (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 2002). Particularly in those approaches that have ‘exposition’ in the centre. See for instance, B. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching. Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

40. O. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004); C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005).

41. See for instance H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

The fact that preaching is a form of interhuman communication is not very much contested among homileticians. However, it is not directly obvious what is meant by interhuman communication. A commonly used strategy is to suppose that preaching is just another form of interhuman communication. It has been tempting for homileticians to select a communication model or theory to reframe the dimension of human interaction in preaching.⁴² Two strategies are employed by homileticians. Some choose one particular model, others glue different models together. Due to his interest in persuasion, G. Otto adopted Maletzke's model for mass communication in order to conceptualise the communicative process that takes place in preaching.⁴³ On the other hand, G.J.D. Dingemans describes several communication models and discusses how each model is relevant to an aspect of the preaching event. Because of the complexity of preaching, he then presents a model that consists of several existing communication models together. His approach to preaching is a mixture of the models of Newcomb, and Shannon and Weaver.⁴⁴

At least three methodical reasons call for caution in adopting a particular model or in combining several existing theories though. First, the application of communication models in homiletics suggests that preaching is just another type of communication that fits existing models. Theologians rightly object against this strategy as a kind of reductionism. Preaching is different from other scenes of human communication and deserves a corresponding scholarly treatment of its 'otherness'. Regardless whether or not preaching is a 'sui generis' kind of communication as homileticians in the past have insisted upon⁴⁵, its particular character calls for a more specific approach rather than adopting one or more favourite models.

This theological objection gives way to a second consideration. The use of communication models to describe the human dimension of preaching creates an impediment for scientific progress in the field. Homileticians need to develop models of homiletic communication within their own field of research. In a later phase they may compare their models with the existing ones. This requires

42. See for an overview of communication theories and models, D. McQuail and S. Windahl, *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication*. 2nd edition. (London: Longman, 1993); S. W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*. 7th edition. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002).

43. G. Otto, *Predigt als rhetorische Aufgabe. Homiletische Perspektiven*. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987). For Maletzke's model see also McQuail and Windahl, *Communication Models*, pp. 46–53.

44. Cf. G. D. J. Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders. Hermeneutische homiletiek*. (Kampen: Kok, 1991), Ch. 10. See McQuail and Windahl, *Communication Models*, pp. 16–23, 27–39.

45. Cf. T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde homiletiek*. (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1926).

intradisciplinarity as I have argued earlier.⁴⁶ A third objection concerns the nature of practical theological research. Applying communication models to the preaching event suggests that practical theology *applies* findings from the non-theological sciences to theological areas. This approach betrays a rather outdated view on the relation between practical theology and the social sciences.

A final reason concerns the application of the methods and procedures of Grounded Theory. Since this study aims for theory development we need an open framework that is not burdened by preconceived models from other disciplines. When I discuss interhuman communication here, I do so in view of the need for a demarcation of the field of research. Adopting an existing communicative theory may block the creation of new categories and forces the analysis into preconceived notions. Barney Glaser points out that too much theory at the beginning of empirical research forces the analysis at the expense of the generation of new concepts.⁴⁷

Besides these methodological problems, the idea of ‘communication’ itself poses a more substantial worry. Though homiletical literature is scattered with advices to improve communication or reflections on what homiletic communication might be, the notion itself is barely discussed. In his book *Speaking into the air* the communication scholar John Durham Peters discusses some fundamental problems with communication. By showing the troublesome history of the idea of communication Peters argues that the notion of communication suggests an ‘ideal of interpersonal understanding’ or an ‘angelic dream of human contact’. He traces various meanings of the term communication, namely its nineteenth-century background in psychology, and its centrality in twentieth century thought.⁴⁸ He concludes that the attempts to solve the ‘communication failure’ are either *technical*, such as in Shannon and Weaver’s model, or *therapeutical*, such as in Carl Roger’s approach to communication:

The technicians of communication [...] all think the imperfections of human interchange can be redressed by improved technology or techniques. They want to mimic the angels by mechanical or electronic means. [...] The therapeutic vision of communication in turn, developed within humanist and existentialist psychology, but both its roots and branches spread much wider, to the nineteenth century attack on Calvinism and its replacement by a therapeutic ethos

46. See above, section 1.5.

47. See for the emergence versus forcing discussion in Grounded Theory methodology, B. G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis. Emergence vs Forcing*. (Sociology Press, 1992); U. Kelle, “‘Emergence’ vs. ‘Forcing’ of Empirical Data? A Crucial Problem of ‘Grounded Theory’ Reconsidered.” in: G. Mey and K. Mruck, editors, *Grounded Theory Reader. Historical Social Research Supplement*. (Köln: Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung, 2007). See further below, Chapter 4.

48. J. D. Peters, *Speaking into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication*. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 6–22.

of self-realization and to the self-culture pervading American bourgeois life. *Both the technical and therapeutic visions claim that obstacles and troubles in human contact can be solved, whether by better technologies or better techniques of relating, and hence are also latter-day heirs to the angelological dream of mutual ensoulment.*⁴⁹

Communication, as Peters understands it, is the reconciliation of the self and others. It is as much dissemination as it is dialogue, he argues in a chapter on Plato and Jesus.⁵⁰ The sacred status of dialogue and reciprocity is a moral ideal, but insufficient. ‘The Christian doctrine of communication is a doctrine of broadcasting, of single turns, expended without the expectation that one good turn deserves another.’⁵¹ Inspired by Peter’s argument, communication scholar Quentin J. Schultze suggests that research on listening must take place without an hidden agenda that turns listeners into speakers and has to study the virtue of listening as willingness and courage to listen to others, ourselves and ‘upwardly’.⁵²

This substantial worry with an uncritically acclaimed notion of communication refracts into two additional worries that concerns the usage of communication in practical theology and homiletics respectively. First, the idea of communication has governed practical theology for many decades.⁵³ Van der Ven’s influential proposal of empirical theology, for example, is designed within the framework of hermeneutical-communicative action.⁵⁴ According to Van der Ven practical theology takes place in a situation of pluralism and conflict of interpretations. Handling this requires a communicative praxis that focusses on exchange, understanding, and striving for consensus.⁵⁵ Though he deals with the limits and constraints of communication, practical theology, he argues, ‘must find ways to expand and thus transcend these limits’.⁵⁶ Yet in the light of the reflections of the fundamental brokenness of human communication, the worry that with the concept of communication practical theology attempts to reach

49. Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, p. 29. *Emphasis mine.*

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–62.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

52. Schultze, ‘God-problem’, p. 16.

53. For the idea of communication in practical theology in general, see Immink, *Faith*, pp. 119–137. For a comprehensive habermasian perspective on discourse and its implications for practical theology, see H. de Roest, *Communicative Identity. Habermas’ perspectives of discourse as a support for practical theology*. (Kampen: Kok, 1998). Recent articulations, though, do not even mention the notion, such as J. Swinton and H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (London: SCM Press, 2006).

54. J. A. van der Ven, *Practical Theology. An Empirical Approach*. (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993).

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

beyond its limits seems legitimate. Van der Ven's reflections on Christian eschatology acknowledge the untenability of 'angelic communication' as Peters calls it. His normative insistence on 'freedom, equality, universality and solidarity'⁵⁷, however, seems to take this back again. Neither can the fundamental problem of communication be solved ethically. The suspicions raised by communication scholars keep reminding us of the fact that the concept of communication remains a spurious notion.

Peter's and Schultze's sober comments also refract in homiletics. They pose a threefold substantial worry with a too optimistic use of the notion of communication in theories of preaching. The crises of modernity and postmodernity confront preachers with autonomous listeners, so better communication is required. Better communication then is seen as lubricant for better preaching. Ethically, improvement of communication entails the demise of power-plays, violent speech and those marginalised.⁵⁸ Technically, enhancement of communication consists of better techniques and methods for effective transmission or smooth performance of the message.⁵⁹ Therapeutically, improved communication helps preachers to deal with their emotions because they shape preaching and may pose a relational barrier for good communication. Due to clinical psychology homiletics have been enriched with insights regarding the impact of the preacher's fears and foes in the act of preaching.⁶⁰ Ethical, technical, and therapeutic means to overcome the problems in human communication have their place. Deconstructing oppressive narratives, mastering techniques, and improving relational sensitivity are important competencies of preachers. Yet Peters' wisdom comes first, namely, that it is a 'mistake to think that communications will solve the problems of communication, that better wiring will eliminate the ghosts.'⁶¹ Further, he warns us

that we misspend our hope in seeking some kind of spiritual fullness or satisfaction in communication. The history of thinking about our mutual ties, as well as the history of modes of connection, from writing to the development of electrical media, shows that the quest for consummation with others is motivated by the experience of blockage and breakdown. [...] Communication is ultimately unthinkable apart from the task of establishing a peacable kingdom in which

57. *Practical Theology*, pp. 74-76.

58. Cf. J. S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. (Chalice Press, 2001).

59. K. C. Anderson, *Preaching with Conviction. Connecting with postmodern listeners*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001); G. Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World. A guide to reaching twenty-first-century listeners*. (Leicester: IVP, 2001).

60. H. C. Piper, *Predigtanalysen. Kommunikation und Kommunikationsstörungen in der Predigt*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976); H. van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit. The impact of personality in preaching*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982).

61. Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, p. 9.

each may dwell in others. Given our condition as mortals, communication will always remain a problem of power, ethics, and art.⁶²

Peters stresses that communication is made of gaps and that the receiver has a privilege that goes beyond the authenticity of the speaker since 'authenticity can be a profoundly selfish ideal.' We have to accept that communication is made of gaps and that a conversation 'consists of single turns that may or may not successfully link with following turns.'⁶³ This fundamental structure of communication gives way to a view on preaching as a social act or conversational discourse.

2.4 THE SOCIAL ACT OF PREACHING

Since the eighties of the previous century the social dimension of preaching has been reassessed in homiletics. Arthur Seters describes how the social dimension permeates preaching:

Every sermon is uttered by socialized beings to a social entity in a specific, social context and always at a social moment. The sacred texts that ground preaching come to expression in the culture of a community. [...] The language of the sermon is socially shaped. [...] All of this is true regardless of our social awareness, position or viewpoint. All preaching then is a social act.⁶⁴

Three social notions characterise the interhuman dimension in preaching: we-intentionality, social setting, and discourse. These are general notions in any communicative action in which speech is at the center of the formation of meaning. To understand this I turn to speech-act-theory, an influential theory on the nature and functioning of discourse in human communication. Adolf Reinach, an Austrian phenomenologist at the beginning of the nineteenth century, talks about social acts in order to articulate how social realities such as promises and laws are created in and through discourse.⁶⁵ The standard formulations of 'speech-acts' however come from J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle.⁶⁶ Communication theorists agree that speech acts (or social acts) are the building blocks for communication and in homiletics speech act theory has gained a respected place in the scholarly discussion since several decades.⁶⁷

62. Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, p. 268.

63. Ibid., p. 266.

64. Seters, A. van, editor, *Preaching as a Social Act. Theology & Practice*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), p. 17.

65. A. Reinach, *Zur Phänomenologie des Rechts. Die apriorischen Grundlagen des Bürgerlichen Rechts*. (München: Im Kösel, 1953); Mulligan, *Speech Act and Sachverhalt*.

66. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*; Searle, *Speech Acts*.

67. See among others, H. W. Dannowski, 'Sprachbefähigung in der Ausbildung.' in: P. Düsterfeld, editor, *Didaktik der Predigt*. (Münster: Comenius-Institut, 1975); P. Bukowski, *Predigt*

According to speech-act theory, discourse is not just the transmission of information. The social act of preaching does not transport a message from one mind into another. The factual (or propositional) content of discourse is an intrinsic part of a larger communicative act in which the speaker tries to accomplish something by using language.⁶⁸ A speaker can be expressing thankfulness, giving an order, declaring or asserting something. In general, a speech act—which can be any utterance or sentence—consists of two parts: a functional part that concerns the attitude or stance of the speaker; and a referential part that determines what the communicative action is about. When a speaker orders his audience to do something, this ‘something’ has referential qualities. Likewise, when a speaker expresses thanks or utters a declaration, there is something to be thankful for and something that is being declared. So the referential or informational is at the heart of discourse while the speech act also assumes or creates a (real) relationship of trust, authority or community. For example, with respect to the referential content of grace, the preacher summons the believers to accept God’s grace, he declares that God is gracious, he commissions his audience to live according to God’s grace, or thanks God for his mercy on behalf of the congregation. The transformational perspective to communication is better suited to explain this than the transmissional perspective.⁶⁹ Speech-act theory does not exclude narrative⁷⁰ and lyrical⁷¹ perspectives to preaching, though its prime interest lies in the use of language rather than in narrative flows or lyrical metaphors.

Since the ‘speech act’ underlines the part of the speaker in the discourse event, I use the notion ‘social act’. Historically, social act was used by Austrian phenomenologists before the linguistic turn in philosophy. Systematically, it is preferable because it emphasizes the social nature of communication. Methodically, it better suits the empirical study of hearing rather than speaking. Three important aspects of the social nature of human communication are important: a social act creates discourse, it entails a shared intentionality of speaker

Wahrnehmen. Homiletische Perspektiven. (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990); W. Lukatis and K.-F. Daiber, ‘Perzeption von Sprechakten aus protestantischen Predigten’. *The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, 2 (1978); F. G. Immink, ‘Prediking als taalhandelend’. *Praktische Theologie*, 24 (1997):4: De twee petten van de prediker.

68. The idea of ‘part’ is better explained by a parts/whole ontology. I cannot go into details here, see B. Smith, ‘Ten Conditions on a Theory of Speech Acts’. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 11 (1984):2.

69. For the two paradigms of transformation (*communicare*) or transmission (*communicatio*), see W. de Moor, *Grondslagen van de interne communicatie*. (Houten/Diegem: Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum, 1997).

70. E. L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot. The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Expanded edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

71. K. Bregman, *De stem uit de oneindigheid. Over de talige vormgeving van preken in het licht van poëzie en poëtica van Martinus Nijhoff*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2007).

and listener, and it includes an engagement on the part of the listener.⁷² So next, I consider preaching as a social act according to these three aspects: (1) pseudo-conversational discourse (section 2.4.1), (2) a shared orientation between speaker and listener (section 2.4.2), and (3) activity on the part of the listener (section 2.4.3).

2.4.1 Discourse

Cooperation lies at the heart of every social practice, a ‘thing people do together’. This extends to preaching. Preaching is among the ‘things Christian people do together [...] in the light of God’s active presence.’⁷³ The participants in a social practice work together to realize what the practice aims to create. This is true for all kinds of social practices, such as playing soccer, sailing, playing in an orchestra, and the student-teacher interaction in the context of a classroom.⁷⁴ Further, this is especially true for those social practices that do not only assume linguistic structures but do themselves consist of linguistic interaction, such as formal meetings, speeches, and counselling sessions. These kinds of social practices produce types of ‘discourse.’⁷⁵ Speaking and hearing together create discourse; the idea of ‘conversation’ is probably helpful here as it has lately been employed by several homiletics in various respects. Ronald Allen speaks about preaching as ‘face-to-face conversation’⁷⁶, Wesley Allen wrote his ‘conversational approach’⁷⁷, and Lucy Rose’s *Sharing the Word* is seminal for all American reflections on preaching as conversation.⁷⁸ In German homiletics Michael Thiele approaches the sermon and virtual dialogue yet he does so within the framework of rhetoric:

72. For a detailed analysis of promise as social act, see Mulligan, *Speech Act and Sachverhalt*, pp. 27–90.

73. C. Dykstra and D. C. Bass, ‘A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices’ in: M. Volf and D. C. Bass, editors, *Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

74. Though there are social practices that do not need language for their actual performance, for instance a game of chess—utterances as ‘chess’ or ‘chessmate’ left aside—Searle has made a strong case that every practice is created and maintained, ultimately depends upon language. See Searle, *Construction*, 59–78.

75. The concept of discourse has been defined and redefined. Sara Mills offers a useful introduction into the terminology, see S. Mills, *Discourse*. (London: Routledge, 2004). Discourse-theory had been developed as a means to analyse how the construction and maintainance of ideology in human communication works, see Bell, A. and Garrett, P., editors, *Approaches to Media Discourse*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 23–29.

76. R. J. Allen, ‘Preaching and the Other’. *Worship*, 76 (2002):3, pp. 214–217.

77. O. W. Allen Jr., *The Homiletic of All Believers. A Conversational Approach*. (Westminster John Knox, 2005).

78. L. A. Rose, *Sharing the Word. Preaching in the roundtable church*. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

the sermon is a public address or 'religious rhetoric' (*geistliche Beredsamkeit*).⁷⁹ The conversational approach to preaching restores the usage of *homily* rather than *sermo* in order to denote the preacher's part of the conversation.⁸⁰

When we apply this to the interhuman interaction in preaching, Werner Jetter's reconstruction of preaching as 'conversation' is helpful.⁸¹ According to Jetter, the conversation is 'an original and fundamental appearance of human life'⁸², or as Rowan Williams puts it, 'human doing and making has a 'conversational' dimension in its calling forth unceasing response and reflection in the form of further doing.'⁸³ Yet we have to bear in mind that the monologue, that preaching usually is, does not qualify as conversation per se. Having qualities of a conversation, preaching is in fact a pseudo-conversation since, in general, listeners do not talk back and the basic shape of a sermon is a monologue despite experiments that have been held now and then with true interactional or conversational preaching. So, why not consider the sermon as a single conversational turn that picks up the faith-conversation in the congregation, sustains it, qualifies it, criticizes it and carries it forward? Preaching is pseudo-conversational discourse, because it represents only one 'turn' while at least two turns are required to qualify as proper conversation. Johan Cilliers is perhaps too minimalistic when he talks about the sermon as 'preface' to a conversation that continues in the congregation⁸⁴ yet the thought itself is valuable to entertain. Interestingly, in his enumeration of activities that communicate God's grace H. Berkhof locates the conversation next to the sermon:

The sermon, though monological in form, presupposes (witness its name "homily") the context of the reacting congregation and must therefore issue in a discussion if the gospel in all its relevance is to become flesh and bones in the life of the congregation. The discussion cannot replace the sermon, but the reverse is equally impossible. The discussion is the extension of the sermon, the application as it is continued and elaborated by those who will have to confirm its truth in their daily life in the world.⁸⁵

A sermon is a monologue. Conversations, however, usually consist of turns of speech, such as the listener becoming speaker and vice versa.⁸⁶ Yet Jetter points

79. M. Thiele, *Geistliche Beredsamkeit. Reflexionen zur Predigtkunst*. 1st edition. (Kohlhammer, August 2004).

80. For instance, Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders*, pp. 41–43, 164–167.

81. Jetter, 'Gespräch', pp. 206–208. Cf. also Bohren, *Predigtlehre*, pp. 516–528.

82. Jetter, 'Gespräch', p. 206.

83. R. Williams, *On Christian Theology*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), Challenges in Contemporary Theology, p. 198.

84. J. Cilliers, 'Prediking as ekklesiale diskoers: 'n ontwerp'. *Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif*, 33 (1992), p. 385.

85. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, p. 362.

86. Alternative approaches to preaching go beyond the monologue, like 'round table preach-

to an important feature of the conversation that is usually seen as the weakness of the monologue but fundamental for our understanding of the conversation: silence. He states that 'in the silence in which a conversation terminates the other is acknowledged in his otherness, embraced in love, and released in freedom.'⁸⁷ Hence, the listener is the 'silent partner' in preaching.⁸⁸ Although the preacher can disrespect the hearer's freedom, he cannot take away this freedom. In the silence of listening the hearer ends the conversation rather than the preacher. So when preacher and audience meet in the event of preaching both have their own part in the creation of this unique conversation. Dialogue is the generic nature of preaching.⁸⁹ This remains true whether the preacher succeeds in creating the optimal environment for the hearer to play his part, or not.⁹⁰ In the light of the considerations above, the limits of the term and its wide application, it seems appropriate that research in sermon reception focusses on conversational discourse as social act of preacher and listeners.⁹¹ Having said this we have to bear in mind Peters' insight:

The image of conversation as two speakers taking turns in order to move progressively toward fuller understanding of each other masks two deeper facts: that all discourse, however many the speakers, must bridge the gap between one turn and the next, and that the intended addressee may never be identical with the actual one.⁹²

ing'. See for example, J. S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit. Where leadership and preaching meet*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Rose, *Sharing the Word*; M. Kraft, 'Das Gespräch im Gottesdienst. Entwicklungen in der Ladenkirche in Berlin-Spandau.' *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft und Praxis*, 85 (1996). See for the concept of 'turn-taking' in conversation analysis, N. Markee, *Conversation Analysis*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), pp. 82–98.

87. Jetter, 'Gespräch', p. 210.

88. *Ibid.*, 213.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 215–221. See also Immink, 'Human Discourse', pp. 159–190.

90. See McSpadden, 'Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Post-Christendom Church' for the use of 'environment' in preaching. See also K.-P. Hertzsch, 'Predigtlehre. Erwartungen und Möglichkeiten'. in: K.-H. Bieritz et al., editors, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990), pp. 24–25.

91. Both in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis the notion 'conversation' functions as an important direction for research. Cf. D. Boxer, *Applying Sociolinguistics. Domains and face-to-face interaction*. (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2002), Impact. Studies in Language and Society; M. L. Geis, *Speech Acts and Conversational Interaction. Toward a theory of conversational competence*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1995); S. Titscher et al., *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*. (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

92. Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, p. 265.

2.4.2 Shared intentionality

The speaking part in preaching is one turn in an ongoing conversation, listeners complete the conversation. But, what makes these two conversational ‘turns’ the parts of one conversation as a whole? Socio-linguistics explains how social practices have an inherent—though often not socially explicated—structure in which the participants are aware of collectively accomplishing something.⁹³ This structure as David Buttrick puts it, is a ‘shared-in-common world in human consciousness.’⁹⁴ Wilbur Schramm once coined the concept ‘shared orientation.’ According to Schramm, communication is ‘a shared orientation towards an informational set of signs.’⁹⁵

Schramm’s definition singles out two notions that are interlocked and vital for any communicative event: *referentiality* and *relationality*. First, virtually every conscious act of communication has something as its content or is about something. To communicate is to refer to something that exists outside the minds of the participants as the object of their interaction. Second, in the act of communication the participants enter into and maintain a social relationship.⁹⁶ Therefore, to grasp communication is to understand how people socially relate to each other. Schramm distinguishes four kinds of relationships in which the social roles of the participants are ordered accordingly. These four relationships represent various ‘communication goals or functions’: informing (a transmitting relationship), instructing (an educating or teaching relationship), entertaining (a ritual relationship), and persuading (a rhetorical relationship).⁹⁷ These relationships represent various communicative functions, entail the various ways people try to accomplish socially agreed goals by means of communication—such as expressing, asserting, and commissioning—and thus reflect the various taxonomies of speech acts developed by philosophers of language.⁹⁸

It is not immediately obvious, however, how preaching serves these various

93. Boxer, *Applying Sociolinguistics*, pp. 1–20, 125–146.

94. D. G. Buttrick, ‘Who is Listening?’ in: G. R. O’Day and T. G. Long, editors, *Listening to the Word. Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p. 196.

95. W. Schramm, ‘The Nature of Communication between Humans’ in: W. Schramm and D. F. Roberts, editors, *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Revised Edition*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 13.

96. See for the concept of ‘social relationship’ H. de Jager and A. Mok, *Grondbeginselen der sociologie*. (Foundations of sociology). 11th edition. (EPN, 1999), p. 126. They borrow the concept from Max Weber and juxtapose it to an affective relationship which is psychologically determined by the emotional attachment between people.

97. Cf. Schramm, ‘Nature of Communication’, pp. 34–49. Denis McQuail organised the models of mass communication in a similar fashion, see McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, pp. 52–59. McQuail lists communication as transmission, expression or ritual, publicity and reception.

98. Cf. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts*, pp. 51–113.

communicative functions, nor what ‘things are done with words’ in the sermon. Homileticians offer diverging analyses, usually depending on the author’s theological point of view. Preaching is a kind of informing; some homileticians stress the primary use of the ‘indicative’ in the sermon⁹⁹ or frame the act of preaching in terms of transmitting a message. The Schleiermacherian tradition embodies a more expressive or ritual approach to preaching.¹⁰⁰ Rhetorical approaches put preacher and audience in a persuasive relationship.¹⁰¹ Preaching as faith-instruction defines the relationship between preacher and audience as a teaching relationship. In the early church this commissioning kind of preaching was part of the rites of initiation for the newly baptised.¹⁰²

The orientation the preacher and his audience share, defines their social relationship and determines what ‘things they do with words’ *together* and what kind of communicative functions they install during their conversation. The four approaches mentioned, do not exist in an ideal state, but merge in blended forms.¹⁰³ Bieritz distinguishes between three functions of preaching¹⁰⁴ and all three correspond to different (social) relationships between the preacher and his audience:

- The explanatory function (*Darstellungs- bzw. Symbolfunktion*)—preaching aims to present the biblical witness concerning the history of Jesus Christ and the hermeneutic tradition of the Church;
- The familiarizing function (*Kundgabe- bzw. Symptomfunktion*)—preaching makes the experiences of faith common among its participants;
- The appeal function (*Appell- bzw. Signalfunktion*)—preaching summons to belief and have faith, it is a call into the new life that has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Besides the various relationships and communicative function there is another factor, namely ‘referentiality’. To communicate is to make *something* in common, whether it is to entertain that ‘something’, to be informed about it, or to be

99. J. Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching. A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), pp. 7–29.

100. W. Gräb, *Predigt als Mitteilung des Glaubens. Studien zu einer prinzipiellen Homiletik in praktischer Absicht*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1988).

101. L. L. Hogan and R. Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation. Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); G. Otto, *Rhetorische Predigtlehre. Ein Grundriss*. (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1999).

102. Edwards, *History*, pp. 84–92.

103. Vincent Brümmer argues for speech acts in general that they are always a blend of the four main types: constatives, expressives, commissives or prescriptives. See V. Brümmer, *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry. An introduction*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), Ch. 2.

104. K.-H. Bieritz, ‘Predigt und rhetorische Kommunikation’. in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990), 90–91.

transformed by it. So at the core of a social act lies ‘intentionality’. Complicated as it is, the notion of intentionality has a rich history from Aristotle to Brentano and has been reassessed by John Searle.¹⁰⁵ A concise definition runs like this:

intentionality is a property of the mind by which it is *directed at, about, or of* objects and states of affairs in the world.¹⁰⁶

The bullet-theory of communication reconstructs a communicative event in terms of a package that is transmitted from one mind into another.¹⁰⁷ But intentionality is not about getting across a message. Relation and content together replace the somewhat objective idea of ‘message’, speaker and listener are oriented towards something outside their individual minds. Intentionality does not go along with the idea that the reality referred to in communication is a mere socially constructed reality either.

Preaching, therefore, is a dynamic and complex communicative phenomenon in which speaker and listeners adopt a range of potential roles. None of them is exclusively said to be the one and only communicative function of preaching, while the content for today’s sermon may be relatively fixed and determined by Scriptural text, doctrinal topic, or contemporary theme. Empirical research takes these various relationships seriously and accept that preaching is more than getting across a message or creating a reality that only exists in the minds of those communicating.

2.4.3 Is listening an activity?

Listening behaviour has been reconstructed on a scale from passive receiver to active participant. The rhetorical approach, for instance, primarily views the listener as an object of persuasion. In speech, the emotions of the audience are moved, intellects are challenged and wills are changed. Preaching is acting upon an audience to move them to faith, to get across the message of the gospel or to persuade them of the truth of faith. Listening is reconstructed as receiving a message, becoming persuaded of the truth, or emotionally stirred by the proclamation of God’s Word. On the other end, however, postmodernist approaches reconstruct the listener as an active agent of meaning. The key term then is ‘interpretation’ or ‘meaning-construction’. The sermon is seen as an open piece of art without definite meaning and the preacher facilitates the listener to create his

105. J. R. Searle, *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) See also B. Smith, *Austrian Philosophy. The Legacy of Franz Brentano*. (Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 1994), pp. 37–63.

106. Guttenplan, S., editor, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, p. 379.

107. Cf. Schramm, ‘Nature of Communication’, p. 9.

own meaning. Language must be open, structures of discourse indefinite, and the creation of meaning is left to the audience. So rhetorical and hermeneutical approaches to preaching entail also different reconstructions of the audience. Nevertheless, the whole idea of 'audience activity' remains rather unarticulated. Perception, selection, evaluation, hearing, thinking, and constructing meaning all fall under the larger rubric of activity. Yet the activity of meaning making is not very much developed, nor are passive processes such as being moved or becoming persuaded.

Communication scholars rightly point to some difficulties with the notion. These difficulties are twofold. First, the notion of activity is not very much theoretically developed. Secondly, passivity and activity are used normatively instead of descriptively.

David Morley, for instance, states that 'recent audience work can be characterized largely by two assumptions: (a) that the audience is always active (in a nontrivial sense), and (b) that media content is always polysemic, or open to interpretation. The question is what these assumptions are taken to mean exactly, and what their theoretical and empirical consequences are.'¹⁰⁸ Further, the distinction between passive and active audiences functions more or less ideologically. Or as McQuail puts it: 'There has been a tendency, whether explicitly or not, to view active media use as "better" than passive spectatorship.'¹⁰⁹ To reflect on audiences as 'passive' is judged morally problematic; the active audience on the other hand, is seen as the preferred reconstruction. In this vein, rhetoric has been downplayed as making listeners dumb in the powerplay of words and persuasive manipulation; while the open-art approach invites listeners to construct meaning in order to diminish the violence of closed (definite) language, references and dogmatics. This might be too much of a caricature. Yet the parallel between passive/active and rhetorical/constructivist miraculously coincides with judgments like modern/postmodern or authority/autonomy or theological orthodoxy/subjective bricolage of faith.

The whole passive/active distinction, however, is rather troublesome as the development of the notion in communication studies shows. Against the commonly held view that audiences are passive consumers of propaganda and other media, Raymond A. Bauer puts forward the idea that audiences show resistance against media influences.¹¹⁰ In a seminal piece he gathers and summarizes research findings that demonstrate that audiences are acting and reacting sub-

108. D. Morley, 'Active Audience Theory. Pendulums and Pitfalls', *Journal of Communication*, 43 (1993):4, p. 13.

109. D. McQuail, *Audience Analysis*. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 22.

110. R. A. Bauer, 'The Obstinate Audience. The Influence Process from the Point of View of Social Communication', in: W. Schramm and D. F. Roberts, editors, *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Revised Edition*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

jects that are not easily moved by propaganda or advertisements. Personality, character, equilibrium, gender and expectations are all in play when audiences are exposed to media. 'The communicator is generally attributed considerable latitude and power to do what he pleases to the audience.'¹¹¹ It appears, however, that audiences are much more obstinate than scholars believed until then. The idea of audience activity was born. The effects of communication were more limited than thought before because audiences turned out to be more 'selective in perception and resistant to unwanted influence.'¹¹²

In a similar but critical overview of the research literature on audience, Frank Biocca summarizes 40 years of audience studies as follows: 'On one end of the rope we find the *active audience*, individualistic, "impervious to influence", rational, and selective. On the other end, we have the *passive audience*: conformist, gullible, anomic, vulnerable victims.'¹¹³ At the background of Bauer's ideas on the active audience, Biocca deals with the intellectual origins of the concept in his article. The notion, he argues, is rather intangible, imprecise and too ideologically laden despite the fact that many authors say it is 'important', 'fundamental' or even 'paradigmatic'. First, the vagueness surrounding the concept makes it hard to be used for research purposes. It seems to cover everything without specifying anything, so he says. Further, the construction of the active audience is foremost ideologically motivated rather than the result of careful empirical research. The underlying anthropology, Biocca sharply analyses, is that of 'the liberal democratic ideals of individual rationality, independence, and "self-possession". [...] Freedom of choice and the exercise of that choice was a sign of "audience activity" and, in another sphere, the health of the body politic.'¹¹⁴

Positively, Biocca comes with a more nuanced and conceptually informed view on the activity (and passivity) of the audience. The audience is not the only agent of meaning. The formal properties of media channels, the structure of messages, the semantic associations and subconscious processes of audience members, and social usages of media contribute to the formation of meaning. Biocca concludes that, as a meta-construct, the notion 'audience activity' must be dropped.¹¹⁵ He does, however, formulate five elements that are worth studying as separate concepts: selectivity, utilitarianism, intentionality, involvement and

111. Bauer, 'The Obstinate Audience', pp. 327–328.

112. McQuail, *Audience Analysis*, p. 59.

113. F. A. Biocca, 'Opposing Conceptions of the Audience. The Active and Passive Hemispheres of Mass Communication Theory'. *Communication Yearbook. An Annual Review*, 1 (1988):11, p. 51.

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–57.

115. *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72. Cf. McQuail's judgement that the general notion is 'an unsatisfying concept', see McQuail, *Audience Analysis*, pp. 58–62.

resistance.¹¹⁶ His conclusion is notable, namely that

we can see that the concept of active audience defined as cognitive independence, personal freedom, and imperviousness to influence appears strangely to be both bloated and seemingly anemic and thin. By attempting to cover everything the audience member does, it ends up specifying little and excluding nothing. Every twitch, every thought, every choice—both mindful and mindless—is recorded as evidence of “activity”. [...] But our audience is made of real human beings throbbing with life in a society that—thankfully—has not yet reached a point of psychic and social closure, a state of total determinism. Should we be surprised when, as social scientists, we behold perception, choice, reflection, and even selection? And if in the shopping isles of media fare our active citizen chooses his or her banalities in pink, blue, or red boxes, should we pronounce them free, active, and “impervious to influence”?

Obviously, this is not the final word about audience activity in communication studies. Yet Biocca's sobering perspective became formative for later research. McQuail, finally, enumerates eleven dimensions of audiences such as size and duration, locatedness in space, group character, social relations between sender and receiver etc. In fact, the degree of passivity or activity is the first mentioned.¹¹⁷

For my study this overview from audience studies is relevant for two reasons. First, Biocca's criticism that the concept of the active audience is too much ideologically laden rather than descriptively used also holds for many homiletical reflections on audience behaviour. Perhaps Biocca's charge is too austere that the active audience concept is derived from an Enlightenment view of the individual as a self-determining, independent, and totally free subject. Yet his analysis must stimulate homileticians to seek a theological rendering of the concept that takes into account the religious complexity of individuals and groups in terms of creation and sin, optimistic meaning making and fragmented existence, brokenness and the longing for renewal.¹¹⁸ Such a theological awareness reflects upon two additional aspects. There is a divine-human dynamic at work in preaching that cannot be overruled by a free, libertarian view of the listener.¹¹⁹ Further, the listener is part of a community of faith and through preaching this community is generated. Preaching takes place ‘in the sphere of the church.’¹²⁰ Therefore, the hearer is not an atomic, self-subsistent individual but a creation by the Divine Spirit through the call of the gospel. The whole issue of activity

116. Biocca, ‘Opposing Conceptions of the Audience’, pp. 53–54.

117. McQuail, *Audience Analysis*, p. 150. His use of the theoretical code ‘degree of’, however, is not very obvious. Why not ‘types of passivity’ or ‘conditions for activity’?

118. Cf. H. Luther, *Religion und Alltag. Bausteine zu einer praktischen Theologie des Subjekts*. (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1992).

119. For the notion ‘divine-human dynamics’, see Chapter 3.

120. Barth, *Homiletics*, pp. 56–57.

or passivity must be framed in terms of the listener's faith, both freely given (passively) in an urge to accept (actively). Secondly, empirical research must not depart from the assumption that a listening congregation exists of active listeners. A Grounded Theory on sermon listening must take into account that the pseudo-conversational discourse of preaching includes a gap, the turn of the listener. Yet how active or passive the listener is in his turn of the conversation is not to be decided on philosophical or pre-empirical grounds.

Finally, passive or active listeners do not exist. Listeners are not simply 'second preachers'. Neither mere activity, nor mere passivity characterises the listener. The Canons of Dordt already knew that hearers of the Word are not dumb bricks and blocks to be forcefully moved.¹²¹ Therefore, I take the notion of the active listener as sensitizing concept. It does justice to the role of the listener as subject in the preaching event—a Reformed text such as the Canons of Dordt sustains this. Whether the notion is an adequate concept to function in homiletical theory must turn out if (not when) it earns its place. This, however, depends on the data.¹²²

2.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Homiletic interaction is a first sensitizing concept that demarcates the substantive area for empirical research. The approach in this chapter is a mixture of phenomenology, critical appraisal and conceptual analysis. Phenomenologically, I moved from the appearance of preaching to a few defining characteristics, such as the normative (religious) convictions of preacher and audience (section 2.2). Critically, I reviewed the notion of communication in homiletics with help of Peters' lucid presentation of the idea of communication as presented in his *Speaking into the air* (section 2.3). I formulated a few methodological and theoretical worries with the concept of communication in homiletics. Conceptually, I analysed homiletic interaction in four key terms: social act, discourse, shared intentionality, and the activity of the listener (section 2.4). The ideas in this chapter are too fragmented to function as an heuristic or an hermeneutical framework for empirical research. Negatively, I avoided preconception by adopting an existing theory of communication with all its intricacies indicated in the section on interhuman communication. Positively, I enabled myself to

121. The Canons of the Synod of Dordt, Chapter 3 and 4, article 16: ita etiam haec divina regenerationis gratia, non agit in hominibus tanquam truncis et stipitibus, nec voluntatem ejusque proprietatis tollit, aut invitam violenter cogit. See Schaff, P., editor, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds. With translations*. Volume III, The Creeds of Christendom. With a History and Critical Notes. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 568.

122. About concepts 'earning their way', see B. G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory. Issues and Discussions*. (Sociology Press, 1998).

articulate a dimension of the substantive area of sermon-listening without too much theoretical detail. In short, listening to a sermon is studied as homiletic interaction, preaching being a social act, conversational discourse with a shared intentionality. In this social act listeners have their own role.

Listening to a sermon, however, is not a just a matter of interhuman discourse. It also has religious features (section 2.1). In the next chapter I argue that within the social act of preaching as something human beings do together, a divine-human dynamic is at work. The goal of empirical analysis is to reconstruct the nature and properties of this religious quality of listening. This is pursued in the next parts of this study. The connection between homiletic interaction as social practice and the divine-human dynamics in preaching is important because, as Gerrit Immink puts it

[i]f there were no such linkage, our interhuman speaking and acting within the communication of faith would become completely haphazard. For God would then be able to reveal himself in anything—or rather in nothing.¹²³

123. Immink, *Faith*, p. 134.

3

DIVINE-HUMAN DYNAMICS

3.1 THE RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS OF PREACHING

‘The gospel is the power (*dunamis*) of God for the salvation of everyone who believes’ (Rom 1: 16). This Pauline phrase is the key to understand the religious nature of preaching according to the German practical-theologian Manfred Josuttis. Preaching, Josuttis says, is an instance of the ‘divine dynamics of the gospel.’¹ Neither the intentions of the speaker, nor the consciousness of the listeners sufficiently describe what happens in preaching but in the act of preaching ‘a creative potency is effective, from which a particular self-dynamic emerges.’² The dynamics of preaching entails a creative word, not because of human qualities, but rather due to the creative force of the gospel itself, ‘a superhuman power’, ‘uncreated energies of God’, and ‘sacred power’. These terms indicate that effective preaching does not solely depend upon interhuman communication, ‘but primarily depends on the contact with the effective power of the holy Spirit.’³

One does not need to embrace Josuttis’ phenomenological framework to appreciate his idea of ‘divine dynamics’ in order to understand the diversity of divine discourse in preaching.⁴ Josuttis himself roughly distinguishes between two dynamic qualities of the preached word. First, the divine Word takes its

1. M. Josuttis, ‘Von der göttlichen Dynamik des Evangeliums.’ in: R. Ehmman, editor, *Predigen aus Leidenschaft. Homiletische Beiträge für Rudolf Bohren zum 75. Geburtstag*. (Karlsruhe: Verl. Evang. Presseverb. für Baden, 1996).

2. M. Josuttis, *Die Einführung in das Leben. Pastoraltheologie zwischen Phänomenologie und Spiritualität*. (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1996), p. 103.

3. Josuttis, ‘Göttlichen Dynamik’, p. 11. Cf. also M. Josuttis, ‘Verkündigung als kommunikatives und kreatorisches Geschehen.’ in: *Homiletik und Rhetorik in der Predigtarbeit. Homiletische Studien* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1985) and Josuttis, *Die Einführung in das Leben*, pp. 102–118.

4. Josuttis acknowledges the influence H. Schmitz’s philosophical phenomenology exerts on his practical-theological concept, see Josuttis, ‘Göttlichen Dynamik’, p. 24. Cf. H. Schmitz, ‘Atmosphären als ergreifende Mächte.’ in: C. Bizer, J. Cornelius-Bundschuh and H.-M. Gutmann, editors, *Theologisches geschenkt. Festschrift für Manfred Josuttis*. (Bovenden: Foedens, 1996).

place in the inner self of humans and this inhabiting divine Word creates faith. Secondly, the divine Word provides a redemptive future, the believers are kept for the Kingdom of God.⁵

Rudolf Bohren analyses the presence of God in preaching according to three temporal modes of past, presence and future and calls them the time-modes of the divine word (*Zeitformen des Wortes*). Pivotal to Bohren's view is that 'the present Spirit encloses the times'.⁶ Hence, God is present in the preaching event in the *past*-tense because the past is present as remembered past. We remember the marvellous deeds of God (*magnalia Dei*) but in particular God remembers himself and his covenant with mankind. 'The God, who created salvation, is the one who remembers.'⁷ God is also present in a *future* mode of promise and expectation. In the presence of the Spirit, Bohren says, the expectation is represented. Every moment in time has its own relationship to the future. The Spirit makes God's eschatological discourse present in the here and now. Though fragmentary, the one who is coming as eschatological judge and saviour is already present.⁸ Finally, the modes of remembrance and expectation give way to God's *current* presence in the here and now. We have to name God's presence in the here and now, for the exalted Christ who reigns since the day of his ascension, is present in the poor, in his church, and in the created world.⁹ Similarly to Bohren's approach, Alfred Niebergall develops a more christological understanding of the three temporal modes. First, preaching, Niebergall argues, is a witness to Jesus as 'remembrance of the One who has come'. Secondly, preaching is a representation of Jesus as God's Messiah in the present. Finally, preaching is the proclamation of the coming Lord.¹⁰

The three modes of past, present, and future thus provide a more nuanced view on the presence of Christ in preaching. I follow Josuttis' and Bohren's leads, and distinguish between three dynamics in the preaching event that extend beyond the interhuman dimension and move the understanding of preaching into the realm of religion in practice. The first dynamic concerns the past. This *kerugmatic dynamics* of divine discourse in preaching participates in God's decisive speech in the 'Christ-event' and the recording of his speech-acts in

5. Josuttis, *Die Einführung in das Leben*, pp. 104–105.

6. See R. Bohren, *Predigtlehre*. 6th edition. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1993), p. 159. Cf. J. Nierop, *Die Gestalt der Predigt im Kraftfeld des Geistes. Eine Studie zu Form und Sprache der Predigt nach Rudolf Bohrens Predigtlehre*. (Zürich / Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 139–152.

7. Bohren, *Predigtlehre*, p. 161.

8. Ibid., pp. 222–279.

9. Bohren explains the plural mode of the present in three sections: 'Predigt von der Gegenwart Christi im Armen', 'Predigt von dem als Gemeinde existierenden Christus', 'Predigt von der Gegenwart des Welterschöpfers'. Cf. Ibid., pp. 287–301.

10. A. Niebergall, 'Die Predigt als Heilsgeschehen.' *Monatsschrift für Pastoraltheologie*, 48 (1959):1.

Scripture.¹¹ According to this mode, preaching is historically grounded and aims for the audience to participate in the once-and-for-all redemptive history that culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second dynamic relates to the present. Preaching embodies an *interpretative dynamics* in which divine grace is named in the present conditions of human history and experience.¹² This hermeneutical mode of divine discourse in preaching finds analogies for God in human existence and interprets the here and now to locate God's presence accordingly. Finally, in the *eschatological dynamics* preaching anticipates the future. The call of the gospel in preaching opens the Kingdom and the sermon represents realities that concern the coming Kingdom of Christ.¹³

Each of the three types is analysed with help of four parameters. First, the three 'dynamics' assume certain *religious functions* of preaching and reflect a particular theological point of view concerning God's action or presence in the preaching event. Secondly, each dynamics entails a particular *socio-religious role* of the preacher with a corresponding image, such as, prophet or performer. These roles express the social relationships that are created between preacher and audience in the social act of preaching.¹⁴ Thirdly, the dynamics of God and humanity and its embodiment in the role of the preacher also entails certain *conceptual traits* in the actual sermon. Its language may indeed be concrete, metaphorical and close to people's everyday language; perhaps even in a local dialect. Yet underneath the linguistic appearance of the sermon—the locutionary level—lie illocutionary functions that contain referential acts to historical states of affairs, to current experiences or to future expectations. The conceptual shape of the sermon captures how the actual preaching event represents the divine-human dynamic in one of the three temporal modes. Fourthly, there is the *implied audience* in the preaching event, embedded in the role of the preacher and the conceptual shape of the sermon. Semiotic theories of audience reception make clear that messages include encoded 'preferred readings' or interpretation guidelines for audiences.¹⁵ In his typology of audiences, Denis McQuail

11. See for the idea of Scripture as record of divine speech-acts, N. Wolterstorff, *Divine discourse. Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1995); K. J. Vanhoozer, 'From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts. The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of Covenant'. in: C. Bartholomew, C. Greene and K. Möller, editors, *After Pentecost. Language and Biblical Interpretation*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

12. Cf. C. Hilbert, *Naming Grace. Preaching and the sacramental imagination*. (New York: Continuum, 1997).

13. Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 83–84 discusses the power of preaching in terms of opening and closing the kingdom of God. See Schaff, P., editor, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds. With translations*. Volume III, *The Creeds of Christendom. With a History and Critical Notes*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 337.

14. See above, section 2.4.2.

15. Cf. S. Hall, 'Encoding/decoding'. in: S. Hall et al., editors, *Culture, Media, Language*.

distinguishes between the actual and the implied (or potential) audience.¹⁶ The latter being the audience constructed in media-messages. The former consists of those people that are actually there and receive the message or create their own meanings out of it.

The following three sections explore the *kerugmatic* (section 3.2), *interpretative* (section 3.3), and *eschatological* dynamics (section 3.4) in preaching by means of these four aspects. We have to bear in mind though that these distinctions are analytic rather than empirical. They may indeed apply to incidents in the interviews yet the point is not to validate them empirically. The threefold dynamics according to the four aspects of the religious function, the social-religious relationship between preacher and listener, the shape of the sermon and the implied audience together offer a reconstruction of the religious dimension of preaching. The central idea of 'divine-human dynamics' thus religiously sensitizes the area of sermon reception.¹⁷

3.2 KERUGMATIC DYNAMICS

*What is Easter? The Bible answers: resurrection, resurrection of Jesus from the death; and that means: the living God, forgiveness of sins, the empty tomb, conquered death—in a word, Jesus is victor. But really, are these answers? Answers which we understand, with which we may do something? [...] We must die. The untold dark moment will come for us all, when the end comes, at the place where this world sinks away [...] Are we not tempted to say: "O, cease this talk, we have done once-for-all with this terrible enigma of dying. You are ripping open the old wounds anew when you speak of it!" [...] Yet all we can say is to repeat, "But God, who is rich in mercy..." God will have done with this enigma, the enigma of our unbelief. He has already done with it. For the resurrection is not simply one word, one idea, a program. Resurrection is fact. Resurrection has happened. The contradiction is broken. The life of man has already become the stage of the divine triumphant mercy. Jesus Christ has risen from the death! Let us ask God that He may conquer us through his word.*¹⁸

In this sermon, 'Jesus is Victor', Karl Barth illustrates how preaching is the proclamation of God's mighty acts in Christ. 'It is in the very act of proclamation

Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79. (London: Hutchinson, 1980). Cf. also W. Engemann, *Semiotische Homiletik. Prämissen, Analysen, Konsequenzen.* (Tübingen: Francke, 1993).

16. D. McQuail, *Audience Analysis.* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 47–50.

17. The religious dynamics in preaching could also be put in terms of 'divine discourse'. Ciska Stark summarizes protestant preaching as Word of God with three concepts: sacramentality, actuality and referentiality. See, C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God.* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005), pp. 202–204.

18. T. G. Long and C. Plantinga, *A Chorus of Witnesses. Model sermons for today's preacher.* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 74–81.

that 'the event becomes reality for the listener.'¹⁹ The kerugmatic act and the content of the sermon together create a kind of divine speech act that is founded upon God's actions in history and becomes real in its present announcement. Thus the kerugmatic mode of divine discourse in preaching is the reiteration of God's Word from the past into the present.

The primary verb in the New Testament to be used for the preaching activity of the apostles is 'kêrussein'. It points to preaching 'the specific content of the message of the New Testament', not for intellectual understanding but it is a message that calls for faith. In the kerugmatic dynamic it is stressed that listening to a sermon is not just 'listening' but hearing is a gift from God's Word.²⁰ C. H. Dodd sums up the core tenets of the kerugma, 'that the unprecedented has happened: God has visited and redeemed His people.'²¹ The kerugma is not merely a brief summary of the Christian faith. Rather, in the proclamation of God's historic acts and their interpretation in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament the kerugma become available for us now. So it comprises both the activity of preaching, its content, and faithful hearing.

God speaks in the present through the sermon insofar as these historic acts in Jesus Christ are represented and the Scriptures as the inspired witnesses to the Christ-event are explained. Thus Jesus Christ is God's primary speech act and preaching is an indirect act of divine discourse accordingly. Between the Christ-event and the preached Word of the gospel the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament function to mediate God's Word in Christ from the past into the present. The Scriptural narratives, especially the gospel narrative, provide the 'script' for the sermon.²² The preacher 'performs' the narrative of the Scripture in naming God's past redemptive activity in the present. At that moment it becomes a reality in the present. It makes preaching 'a transaction that creates new life in Christ on a new basis furnished by God's redemptive action in Christ.'²³

The previous thoughts on the kerugmatic dynamics in preaching show how divine discourse in the present can be analysed in two dimensions. The preaching event is, in the first place, 'a re-enactment of the redemptive drama of the gospel' and, in the second place, 'an invitation to share in God's redemptive activity in

19. K. Runia, 'What is Preaching according to the New Testament?' *Tyndale Bulletin*, 29 (1978), p. 8.

20. Cf. G. Friedrich, 'Kerux', in: G. Kittel, editor, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Dritter Band*. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1967), pp. 709–712.

21. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments. Three lectures with an appendix on eschatology and history*. (Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1936), p. 70.

22. Relying on Northern-American homiletic developments, Martin Nicol connects the reflections on preaching and performance studies with biblical hermeneutics, see M. Nicol, 'Preaching as Performing Art. Ästhetische Homiletik in den USA', *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft und Praxis*, 89 (2000); M. Nicol, 'Homiletik', *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 123 (1998):11.

23. H. G. Davis, *Design for Preaching*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 111.

the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ'. These two dimensions are reflected in Runia's summary of kerugmatic language in the New Testament: 'The new situation, brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, now becomes a reality for every listener who accepts it in faith.'²⁴

Next, I discuss these two dimensions of the kerugmatic dynamic in three stages. First, what does 're-enactment of the redemptive drama of the gospel' imply for the role of the preacher? Secondly, how does this 're-enactment' give shape to the actual sermon? Finally, what kind of audience is assumed in the 'invitation to share in God's redemptive activity'?

IMAGES OF THE PREACHER: HERALD AND WITNESS According to Thomas Long the herald image entails a theologically high view on preaching 'since it implies that, though the preacher is the one who speaks the words of the sermon, God is actually doing the proclaiming.' The only thing the preacher needs to worry about is that he faithfully serves the King in the proclamation of his message. 'In the case of Christian preaching,' Long argues, 'the message is the good news of Jesus Christ, as entrusted to the herald through the scripture; and the task of the preacher is to announce that news to those to whom the herald is sent.'²⁵ The problem with the herald image, according to Long, is that the herald is essentially dispensable, the main value of the image 'lies in its insistence upon the transcendent dimension of preaching.'²⁶

Long replaces the herald by the image of the witness and, in doing so, he anchors preaching in the congregation. Contrary to the herald the witness is an insider. The witness emerges from within the body of believers. Yet like the herald, the witness is sent with a message. Unlike the herald, however, the witness comes with 'a total engagement of speech and action.'²⁷ The witness is part of the people. He approaches the Scriptures on behalf of the Christian community, even on behalf of the world. Eventually, the herald could be neutral, the witness however is involved in the truth and the preacher's own situatedness influences his testimony. Testimony embodies the preacher's faith and has an expressive dimension: the preacher expresses something, he has become part of it personally and corporately. 'The preacher is listening for a voice, looking for a presence, hoping for the claim of God to be encountered through the text. Until this happens, there is nothing for the preacher to say.'²⁸

24. Runia, 'What is Preaching?', p. 9.

25. T. G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*. (Louisville: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 26.

26. Ibid., p. 28. Further, Long notes the ambiguous relationship between the preacher and the congregation, for on the one hand the herald comes from outside, to the people with news from the king. On the other hand, the preacher is entrusted with the ministry of preaching from within the church.

27. Ibid., p. 42–43.

28. Ibid., p. 44.

SHAPE OF THE SERMON: NAMING GOD'S HISTORIC ACTIONS The kerugmatic dimension can also be traced in the way sermons are conceptually shaped. Four categories outline the conceptual shape of the sermon. First, the sermon refers to God's activity in the past. His presence in the current situation is therefore a reiterated presence, because the preacher reminds the congregation of how God revealed himself in the past. This past revelation of God is object of the faith of the Church and the Scriptures are believed to be the normative record of this divine revelation. God's saving acts in the history of Israel and the life and death of Jesus Christ are leading categories in the sermon. Second, the sermon contains truth claims concerning Christ's life and death. The New Testament *kērugma* centers around what happened to and with Jesus. Part of the kerugma in the New Testament is the belief that in Jesus God was reconciling himself to the world (see 2 Cor 5: 19). So, vital for the kerugmatic dimension in the preaching event is the link between the narratives concerning Jesus and the belief that in Jesus God was acting in relation to humanity in a unique sense. Third, the unique revelation of God in Christ is presented in opposition to general human experience.²⁹ The events of Christ count as God's decisive revelatory speech. Hence, the realities, which the sermon refers to, are historically exclusive and because of their uniqueness they bear redemptive quality. Finally, in the kerugmatic dimension preaching is not merely informing the audience that God spoke in the past. The repetition of God's past speech in the present counts as divine discourse now. The events of Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection, are represented in the sermon to be accepted in faith. Thus, the previous three conceptualisations (God's activity in the past, the unique events of Christ, their redemptive value) culminate in the actualisation of God's historic speech today. Human speech does not merely inform people, but represents the thing itself. As Bonhoeffer explains,

the words communicate something else besides what they are of themselves. They become means to an end [...] The proclaimed word, however, is the thing itself. It does not transmit anything else, it does not express anything else, it has no external objectives—rather, it communicates that it is itself: the historical Jesus Christ, who bears humanity upon himself with all of its sorrows and its guilt.³⁰

29. The latter is part of the interpretative dynamics, see the next section.

30. Cited in: R. Lischer, *The Company of Preachers. Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002), p. 35. Cf. Bonhoeffer's lectures on preaching, C. E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer. Worldly Preaching*. (Nashville New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1975), p. 128.

IMPLIED AUDIENCE: SHARING IN THE CHRIST-EVENT In the kerugmatic dynamics the audience is invited to take part in the redemptive drama that is staged in preaching. Through the sermon the preacher invites his hearers to *recall* what God did in history, particularly in the unique and exclusive narrative of Jesus Christ. This recollection is not a mere remembrance of past events but rather a witness to their actual significance that causes these foundational events to be present in the here and now. For example, reminding a contemporary audience of the death of Jesus and of the biblical witnesses that the death of Jesus somehow counts as a reconciling act between God and humanity, presents the reality of reconciliation in the here and now.

When God's past activity is made present through the proclamation of the gospel, the life of the hearers is confronted with God's mighty acts. Life experiences, hopes and fears, sorrows and joys, trivialities and surprises, guilt and shame are transported into the past of God's saving acts in Jesus Christ. Hence, in the representation of Christ's cross, human guilt, sorrow and fears are put into perspective. On the other hand, the strong focus on the past diminishes the contextuality of preaching since 'in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has acted decisively for the redemption of *all humanity and the whole cosmos*.'³¹ The claims of the gospel are universal and they put all listeners into the same position.

The reminiscence to God's self-giving in Jesus Christ and its re-enactment in the preaching of the gospel has a bearing upon the human life in the here and now. It invites listeners to find meaning in those past events, rather than in the here and now. The once-and-for-all character of God's redemptive activity in Jesus Christ presents a call to believe. The call of the gospel is grounded in past events, codified in the Scriptures and staged in the sermon. The call to faith constitutes the 'encounter' that is usually associated with the kerugmatic tradition. In sum, preaching in the kerugmatic dynamics constitutes 'a dynamic encounter with the Word through which hearers may affirm, question, and ultimately appropriate and articulate for themselves the Christian faith as a living tradition through the power of the Holy Spirit.'³²

31. D. J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ. Preaching in a Postmodern World*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 221. *Emphasis mine*.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

3.3 INTERPRETATIVE DYNAMICS

Do we know what it means to be struck by grace? It does not mean that we suddenly believe that God exists, or that Jesus is the Savior, or that the Bible contains the truth. To believe that something is, is almost contrary to the meaning of grace. ... Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. [...] Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted" [...] In the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our relation to others and to ourselves. [...] "Sin" and "grace" are strange words, but they are not strange things. We find them whenever we look into ourselves with searching eyes and longing hearts.³³

The mode of Paul Tillich's sermon is personal and immanent. The encounter with the *viva vox evangelii* does not echo from the (written) past, conveying what God has said then and there rather his speech continues here, it expresses his engagement with us today and enters human existence. The history of God and humankind is an enduring history. Therefore, we are compelled to listen carefully to what God is saying to us through our life-experiences and through all that happens in the world around us. God encounters us with his grace in major events, but also in the details of our happy moments and often rather worrisome situations. Preaching, then, is an interpretative interplay of preacher and audience to discover God's contemporary speech acts, in our own experiences and in those of others, in past and present. The Scriptures guide this search and helps us to look for God's presence in the world because the narratives in the Bible provide us with a normative patterns to understand the divine-human encounter in the present. Rather than being God's direct voice resounding from the foundational past—as in the kerugmatic dynamic—preaching is God's indirect voice in the here and now that we need to understand to hold out in life with God in the present.

In the interpretative dynamic, divine discourse is experienced in the reality of our everyday lives. Hence, the religious function of preaching according to this dynamics is to direct our lives, to confront our world-view, to transform our mindset, to comfort those in need, to weave our own narratives into God's grand narrative of creation and consummation.

Christians believe that in the proclamation (kerygma) or announcement of God's action in their past history, the same power of God that was active in

33. Long and Plantinga, *A Chorus of Witnesses*, pp. 99–101.

the founding stages of the living tradition becomes living and active again here and now.³⁴

Preaching helps to manage human existence in pointing to God in Christ as he relates to us today through his Spirit. The German homiletician Ernst Lange places the interpretative dynamic at the heart of the preaching event. In the situation of the here and now, which is a situation of conflict and faith-struggle, Lange argues, the preacher provides his audience with a provisional answer to the question: 'what is the relevance of the promise of Christ (*Christusverheißung*) in the here and now of the listeners?'³⁵ The hermeneutical insight of the historicity of knowledge becomes a new point of departure for preaching since the encounter of text and situation stipulates a new situation that eagerly awaits a new divine word. Preaching, with the dictum of Ernst Lange, is a new word (*ein neues Wort*).

This reconstruction of divine-human interaction in preaching has become a dominant voice in homiletics since the empirical turn in the sixties of the previous century. Obviously, the interpretative dynamic of divine-human communication in preaching has been reconstructed in different flavours during the last decades.³⁶ For example, the inauguration of the interpretative paradigm in German homiletics by Ernst Lange can still be recognized in today's postmodern approaches to preaching as 'open art'³⁷ with its interest in understanding and meaning. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the Northern-American context, for instance, the interpretative approach to preaching became dominant in the 'New Homiletic', with its emphasis on plot instead of points and its stress on experience rather than logical arguments.³⁸ More conversational patterns in homiletic proposals, such as Lucy Rose's and John McClure's³⁹, also take the

34. Hilkert, *Naming Grace*, p. 131.

35. E. Lange, *Predigen als Beruf*. (Stuttgart / Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1976), p. 28. On Lange's homiletical thought see J. Henkys, 'Ansätze des Predigtverständnisses' in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990); I. Reuter, *Predigt Verstehen. Grundlagen einer homiletischen Hermeneutik*. Volume 17, Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000); J. van der Laan, *Ernst Lange en de prediking. Een inleiding in zijn homiletische theorie*. (Kampen: Kok, 1989). Also see, section 1.3.

36. Cf. section 1.4.

37. Garhammer, E. and Schöttler, H.-G., editors, *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk. Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik*. (München: Don Bosco, 1998).

38. Named after the developments in German hermeneutics, the 'New hermeneutic' of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. For the New Homiletic, see: E. Hauschildt, 'Homiletische Literatur in den USA'. *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft und Praxis*, 76 (1987); Nicol, 'Homiletik'; F. G. Immink, 'In gesprek met de 'New Homiletic'. Literatuurbericht homiletiek'. *Praktische Theologie*, 28 (2001):3; R. Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching. New Options in Homiletic Method*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

39. J. S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit. Where leadership and preaching meet*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); L. A. Rose, *Sharing the Word. Preaching in the roundtable church*. (Louisville,

interpretative interplay between God's speech and human experience as starting-point. Back in Europe, Dutch homiletics was influenced in the nineties by the hermeneutical approach of Gijsbert Dingemans, who relocated the preacher from the pulpit back into the pew as 'listener among the listeners'. The primary role of the preacher as interpreter is to listen together with the audience, finding out how God addresses us now and to craft meaning for today in a collective hermeneutical event.⁴⁰

IMAGES OF THE PREACHER: PASTOR, CONVERSATION-PARTNER AND ACTOR

The preacher offers his audience interpretations that guide them in their current experiences, to help them understand what is going on in their lives, to comfort them in the here and now, and to retell the Scriptural narratives in such a way that the audience may find themselves enclosed in the stories that tell about God's interaction with humanity.

J. Randall Nichols presents a view on preaching as pastoral communication. He starts with a therapeutical notion, taken from the New Testament corpus of preaching intentions, places it in the centre of homiletic reasoning, and wonders how '*therapeia*' occurs in and through the preaching event.⁴¹ Nichols describes five therapeutic objectives of pastoral preaching: learning of limits and consequences, learning how to manage a conflict, clarifying and restructuring relationships, broadening a person's permissible range of experience and feeling, and finally, 'freeing the captives', which is for people to be free to make the choices and decisions of living.⁴² 'Such preaching,' Thomas Long comments, 'seeks to enable some beneficial change in the hearers, attempts to help them make sense of their lives, and strives to be a catalyst for more responsible living on the part of those who hear.'⁴³ The image of the pastor, according to Long,

carries with it a keen and immediate sense of the gospel as good news *for us*. Something *happens* in pastoral preaching; the needs, hungers, and torn seams in the hearer's experience are not irrelevant, nor are they simply distractions to the preaching of the gospel. They are, instead, the very places where the grace of God may be discovered.⁴⁴

Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

40. Cf. G. D. J. Dingemans, 'A Hearer in the Pew. Homiletical Reflections and Suggestions,' in: T. G. Long and E. Farley, editors, *Preaching as a Theological Task. World, Gospel, Scripture. In Honor of David Buttrick*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

41. J. R. Nichols, *The Restoring Word. Preaching as Pastoral Communication*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 22. See also, for therapy as communicative intention of the New Testament language on preaching Davis, *Design*, pp. 127–138.

42. Nichols, *Restoring Word*, pp. 86–91.

43. Long, *Witness*, p. 31.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The tension between the kerugmatic and the interpretative dynamic is felt in Nichols' account when he wonders how preachers could accomplish their 'task to help people to make sense of their lives, using whatever raw material they bring by way of prior experience and understanding?' Then he asks, 'Where is the balance between helping people *make* meaning for themselves and *telling* them, on perfectly unassailable grounds, what we believe is true?'⁴⁵ Truth is not only transmitted as something that has been given in the past, but is established, found, even constructed, in contemporary conversations. Here the next image of the preacher comes in.

In the work of Ernst Lange as well as in Lucy Rose's we find the image of the preacher as conversation-partner. The preaching event is a moment in an ongoing conversation or, better, in a series of ongoing conversations in the congregation. The preacher's voice is only one voice among others, though his role as preacher is undoubtedly very influential. Both Lange and Rose stress the vital importance of the voices of those who do not occupy the pulpit. Although they lived in different circumstances and came from very different backgrounds, their views on preaching show remarkable similarities. According to Lange, the preacher starts a conversation between the biblical text and the homiletic situation with the aim to make the listener feel understood (*Verständigung*).⁴⁶ Lucy Rose, on the other hand, is interested in the partnership of preacher and congregation in which they 'stand together as explorers, while a text, meaning, or mystery lies on the other side or confronts us as Other.'⁴⁷ They both introduced the idea of round-table preaching in homiletics in order to attain full interactivity between preacher and congregation. The term 'audience' is not really fitting any more.

Recent homiletics introduced new images of the preacher, derived from media and performance studies.⁴⁸ Jana Childers for example, employs images from the theatre, the preacher as 'actor'.⁴⁹ Lively preaching, Childers argues, aims to open an audience up to 'God's movement'. The preacher does not just create a text, a manuscript or a page, but he creates a lively event, 'embodied words that preach'.⁵⁰ The pulpit and the stage, preachers and actors, share three

45. Nichols, *Restoring Word*, p. 3.

46. See for Lange's concept of 'homiletic situation' and its reception, J. Hermelink, *Die homiletische Situation. Zur jüngeren Geschichte eines Predigtproblems*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992) Cf. also van der Laan, *Ernst Lange en de prediking*.

47. Rose, *Sharing the Word*, p. 90.

48. Cf. R. F. Ward, 'Performance Turns in Homiletics. Wrong Way or Right On?' *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 17 (1994):1. Also B. Reymond, *De vive voix. Oraliture et prédication*. (Genève: Labor et fides, 1998).

49. J. Childers, *Performing the Word. Preaching as Theatre*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

50. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

characteristics: action, distance and performance. Performance is honest or truthful, Childers explains, when interpreters express their emotions only to that degree that they can justify.

In the performance of Scripture, the preacher gives his or her body and voice to the text for the purpose of bringing it to life in a particular context. All the preacher's physical, mental and spiritual skills are brought to bear in the task of interpreting and embodying the text.⁵¹

As performer the preacher serves a higher goal, to set in motion what I have called the 'interpretative dynamic', the present divine-human communication which is experienced in our own situation. Childers ends her book with a remark about the singing in the Pentecostal church of her youth. Performing the word, she explains, is similar to that experience, to be 'together in our leaning—leaning into the holy, leaning into the mystery.' It is as if the incarnation of God's Word takes place again, in the here and now.⁵²

SHAPE OF THE SERMON: NAMING ANALOGIES FOR GOD IN EXPERIENCE

Scripture and experience stand in an analogical relationship, for the relationship between God and humanity to which the Scriptures testify is still fundamental to understand human existence. The current situation has analogies in Scripture and vice versa. In the sermon those analogies are named and the human condition is interpreted with help of the analogies of divine interaction with humanity as we encounter in the narrative of the Scriptures. As with the kerugmatic dynamics, the interpretative dynamics in the preaching event is present in the interconnection between several conceptualities: (1) God's activity in the present, (2) the symbolic presence of Christ in the experience of faith, and (3) the analogy between Bible and situation.

God's activity is subsumed under human experience. Hence, categories derived from the human condition in the current situation dominate the sermon. God's activity or its supposed lack is foremost connected with current experiences and events, rather than with God's redemptive actions in the history of salvation. The sermon attempts to provide an answer to the absence of God in our circumstances or to name God's presence, even if it is perhaps not very obvious. The sermon conceptualises divine activity as a reality in the here and now, to be discovered, sometimes even to be regained. Our own experiences and those of others, carefully crafted in the language of the sermon, mediate God's presence to us in our current situation.

51. Childers, *Performing the Word*, p. 52. Richard Ward similarly describes preaching as performance: 'to make the truth of God in Christ Jesus—as it is articulated, enacted, and embodied by the preacher—the *common property* of the worshipping community.' R. F. Ward, *Speaking of the Holy. The Art of Communication in Preaching*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), p. 18.

52. Childers, *Performing the Word*, pp. 143-144.

David Buttrick's homiletic proposal illustrates the idea of analogical conceptualisation in the sermon. The living symbol Christ is present in the church's experience of faith. Buttrick's understanding of Christ as 'living symbol' does not intent to play down the reality of (the historical) Jesus, but 'to express the reality of Christ's saving power in our lives today'.⁵³ For instance, when Buttrick explores the meaning of the paschal mystery and the narratives of Christ's death and resurrection, he is particularly concerned with their significance *now*. On the one hand, the meaning of Christ's resurrection, he quickly confesses, is that 'the resurrection was an event; in a word, something *happened*'.⁵⁴ Yet, the main significance of the resurrection-belief of the early Christians is the proclamation that Jesus is Lord (*kurios*), the coming of his kingdom and his reign in the *now* of the church as Christ's being-saved-community in the world. The Resurrected One is present in his Church, the new community of the King, since 'if a church embodies the ministry of Jesus—preaching and teaching and forgiving and feasting—then in the structures of the church's common life, there is witness to the risen Christ.' Buttrick closes his exposition on the significance of the passion- and resurrection-narratives with the *now* in which 'we are living in the winding-down of God's purpose. God's work in Christ, like a circle in a pool, widens out through time and space. At the same time, even in our muddled world can we not sense that God is beginning to draw the plot lines of the human story towards a denouement?'⁵⁵ In the sermon, the Church expresses its faith as it takes shape in everyday life, both corporately and individually. Hence, in the interpretative mode the expressive is the primary illocutionary function.⁵⁶

IMPLIED AUDIENCE: SEEING LIFE DIFFERENTLY In the interpretative dynamic the audience is not so much being transported to the past of Christ's life and death but finds meaning in how the sermon connects the biblical text with the current situation. The sermon invites the audience into a life with God (*coram Deo*) in the present. If preaching is basically 'the clarification of the human situation' (*klärung der Situation*) in the light of the Messianic promise (*Christusverheißung*), as Ernst Lange tells us, then it is eventually up to the audience to establish whether this

53. D. G. Buttrick, *The Mystery and the Passion. A Homiletic Reading of the Biblical Traditions*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 231.

54. D. G. Buttrick, *Preaching Jesus Christ. An Exercise in Homiletic Theology*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 57.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

56. See further W. Gräb, *Predigt als Mitteilung des Glaubens. Studien zu einer prinzipiellen Homiletik in praktischer Absicht*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1988); R. Lischer, 'Preaching as the Church's Language'. in: G. R. O'Day and T. G. Long, editors, *Listening to the Word. Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993). Despite his clear categories of sin and grace Paul Wilson's model of the four pages may also be located within the interpretative dynamic. See P. S. Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon. A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

clarification has taken place or not. In the interpretative dynamics the audience is invited to see and experience reality differently. The audience's meaning-making activity has at least two characteristics: *understanding* and *appropriation*.

First, the audience is invited either to accept the analogy that the sermon makes between the biblical text and their current situation, or to construct another analogy on the basis of what the preacher says. The analogy conveys the presence of Christ in the here and now and the audience is invited to see how Christ reveals himself in their everyday lives. They look for security, to find a new perspective to life, to experience liberation.⁵⁷ The sermon offers a link between their everyday experiences and what the Scriptures tells us about who God is and how he acts. Hence, the sermon facilitates the conversation between the audience and the Scriptures, between the listener and God.⁵⁸

Second, the acceptance or construction of an analogy between the text and the situation summons the audience to faith, to appropriate the meaning they have discovered. Their situation is put within the world of the Scriptures and God speaks afresh to their situation, not only to confirm them in their faith, but also to challenge and to criticize. A new Word is heard and the audience is challenged to hold on to this God who, against all odds, keeps revealing himself today through in the faith of his church. The experience of redemption is not just brought about by what God has done in the past, but rather through discovering how he still acts today in the midst of suffering, brokenness and heart-breaking situations. God's presence is highlighted in the here and now, to make life more tolerable, to experience comfort, and to instruct in the life of faith. In the interpretative dynamic listeners are not just offered a paradigm for understanding their lives, but also to appropriate God's new Word for today.

The two aspects, accepting the analogy between text and situation and appropriating God's word for his church today, point to a sacramental characteristic of preaching. Situations and experiences are signs of God's redemptive action in the here and now. Through these signs, we are invited to see life differently, and to appropriate an alternative perspective to life accordingly. To experience reality as an environment in which God is present we need not only to be told, we also need to see and accept it. Imagination, therefore, is vital since it 'is the power to reconfigure reality by seeing it through an alternative lens.'⁵⁹

57. See H. van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit. The impact of personality in preaching*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982) who discovered three dimensions in the needs of the listeners.

58. G. D. J. Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders. Hermeneutische homiletiek*. (Kampen: Kok, 1991), pp. 12–14, 58–63.

59. Hilbert, *Naming Grace*, p. 188.

3.4 ESCHATOLOGICAL DYNAMICS

*The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us [...] For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. [...] In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either with conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. [...] It is written that we shall "stand before" him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is [...] that any of us who really chooses shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. [...] Glory, as Christianity teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire ...*⁶⁰

This quote from perhaps the most famous sermon ever preached by the former British atheist C.S. Lewis, has outspoken apocalyptic elements, such as the finality of human existence, God's wrath and glory, his ultimate judgement, the glory that is waiting to fulfill our deepest desires. The sermon represents God's eschatological speech which bears upon the present. The eschatological dynamic in preaching negotiates eternity, or as K.H. Miskotte says, it 'is the distribution of eternal joy'. A.A. van Ruler puts it like this: 'preaching is the favoured setting in which eternity appears in time, the eternal quality of time is disclosed, and God reaches out to humanity'.⁶¹ The sermon as eschatological event, however, seems to be a rather Medieval or perhaps a Renaissance phenomenon.⁶² In contemporary preaching apocalyptic issues of heaven and hell seem outdated or even theologically questionable.⁶³ On the other hand, however, the expectation of redemption in the end of times, the formation of an eschatological community, and the future state of God's Kingdom still fans through sermons and homiletic reflections. Heiko Obermann even called the apocalyptic function of preaching foundational for the protestant understanding of preaching: '[t]he sermon does not inspire good inclinations, but moves the doors of Heaven and Hell. It is the *apocalyptic event* with its double connotation; it reveals God and Devil alike. [...]

60. Long and Plantinga, *A Chorus of Witnesses*, p. 83–84, 86–87.

61. Cf. K. Miskotte, *Het waagstuk der prediking*. (Den Haag: Daamen, 1941), p. 90, A. Van Ruler, 'De prediking als de bemiddeling van het heil'. in: *Reformatiorische opmerkingen in de ontmoeting met Rome* (Hilversum: Paul Brand, 1965). – chapter 5, p. 187.

62. G. Vanden Bosch, *Hemel, hel en vagevuur. Preken over het hiernamaals*. (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1991).

63. See for the neglect of eschatological themes in protestant preaching in the last century, J. S. McClure, 'Preaching, Eschatology, and World View'. *Journal for Preachers*, 13 (1989):1.

man's real existence is revealed in confrontation with Jesus Christ.'⁶⁴ So in spite of its purported controversiality, it is worth exploring what the phenomenon of eschatological dynamic might be like as mode of divine-human communication. God did not speak in the past only, nor does his speech merely continue in the present age but his Kingdom extends beyond the horizons of time. Hence David Buttrick poses the question of the 'vanishing kingdom of God' and argues that we have to preach 'the future of God, so people can change' for

If the future is ignored, the sense of presence attaches to the past and our religion becomes awake, the celebration of a once-was but now-dead God. Thus, we must preach the coming of God's new age so that once more life will be shot through with meaning and mystery and, above all, some living sense of God's presence. We preach the future of God.⁶⁵

The eschatological dynamics in preaching is clearly related to the former two. First, according to C. H. Dodd the eschatological dimension belongs to the components of the New Testament kerugma. Since his insistence on the primacy of the kerugma of Jesus Christ in the preaching of the New Testament, the eschatological dimension has been stressed ever since. In Rudolf Bultmann's existential version of kerugmatic theology, for instance, Christ is present in the proclamation of the church as the 'kerygmatic eschatological salvation event'.⁶⁶ Gerhard Ebeling, the German theologian puts the eschatological dimension in the heart of the kerugma: 'the kerugma proclaims the opening of the eschatological era of God's salvation [...] God's eschatological and decisive act in Christ'.⁶⁷ In recent New Testament scholarship this is stressed again by N. T. Wright in his portrayal of Jesus as apocalyptic prophet.⁶⁸ Secondly, Catherine Hilkert's sacramental understanding of the interpretative dynamic depends upon an almost naturally acknowledgment of the 'not yet' of the Kingdom. Dealing with the human condition in preaching includes—though it might be very shallow, tentative or highly metaphorical—the articulation of convictions that point to the hoped-for substance of what the coming of the Kingdom eventually might embody. Greenshaw rightly states that preaching 'does not show us the same

64. H. A. Oberman, 'Preaching and the Word in the Reformation.' *Theology Today*, 18 (1961):1, pp. 17–18.

65. D. G. Buttrick, *Preaching the New and the Now*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1998), pp. 18–23

66. J. F. Kay, *Christus Praesens. A Reconsideration of Rudolf Bultmann's Christology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 89.

67. G. Ebeling, 'Kerygma.' in: *Wort und Glaube. Dritter Band. Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie, Soteriologie und Ekklesiologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), pp. 520–521.

68. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1997).

old room newly arranged—it opens the door to a whole new room. It opens the new world of the eschaton.⁶⁹

The eschatological dynamic is proleptic discourse for it anticipates God's future speech. As such, it is closely connected to the coming of the Kingdom, in its corporate, its cosmic as well as in its individual dimensions. The proleptic speech act serves two religious functions. First, it is meant to prepare people for the coming of the Kingdom and the day of Judgement. This is a declarative illocutionary function for the justification of the sinner is tied to the citizenship of heaven, as St. Paul relates the two (Phil 3: 20). It is God who declares us righteous and who permits us to enter his Kingdom. So a preacher must speak a liberating Word, according to the Dutch liturgist Gerardus van der Leeuw. The preacher mediates salvation in one major speech act in which all preaching stands or falls: the act of absolution. In the act of absolution God's mercy flows from his future towards us proleptically. His act of forgiveness opens the Kingdom. 'A good sermon', Van der Leeuw says, 'moves within the appearing paradoxes of the situation in the here and now and [...] in the objective atmosphere of God's Word.'⁷⁰ Thus, the eschatological dynamic presents the decisive encounter with the Holy One who takes the final decision regarding our human existence.

A second religious function of the eschatological dynamic is more ethical. Christ's coming Reign summons to act according to his Kingdom; to act from the 'ideal' that eventually will be realized. Perhaps we dare to believe that our ethical choices and actions are part of his reign. In other words, the Kingdom is present in the actions of the Church. To put it differently, even if the Church is not the cause of the Kingdom to come, the church builds *for* the coming Kingdom.⁷¹ Thus, the eschatological dynamic also has an ethical-political dimension when it presents us the values of the Kingdom, it summons us to live a righteous life, to do justice and practice servitude, and it puts the community of the King on earth in a battle-position in the war between good and evil, God and the adversary. Eschatological preaching, P. A. Verhoef writes, 'is a preaching that reflects the tension of this war, that confronts the people of God with these ultimate and final issues.'⁷²

69. D. Greenshaw, 'Preaching and Eschatology. Opening a New World in Preaching.' *Journal for Preachers*, 12 (1989):3, p. 3.

70. G. van der Leeuw, *Inleiding tot de theologie*. (H.J. Paris, 1948), p. 259. Also see G. van der Leeuw, *Liturgiek*. (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1946), pp. 36–37.

71. This distinction between 'building' and 'building for' is taken from N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope. Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (HarperOne, 2007), pp. 207–212.

72. P. Verhoef, 'Eschatological Preaching.' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 2 (1973):1, p. 28.

IMAGES OF THE PREACHER: PROPHET AND POET We have met the preacher as a herald, a witness, a pastor, a conversation-partner, and an actor. Now we meet him as a prophet, who presents both promises and warnings connected to the eternal relationship or covenant, who calls to repent and to act to the advancement of the Kingdom, and as a poet who envisions a new world beyond our own age. In the kerugmatic dynamic, the preacher is concerned with what happened in the past; his interest in the interpretative dynamic lies in the present. In the apocalyptic dynamic, however, the preacher's main concern is the future.

In one of his sermons on 'The heavenly vision and our city', the ethicist Wogaman asks the question 'What is it about the heavenly city that can be translated into the transformation, the change, of the earthly city?' The answer to this question is not found in generating a pathology of our city, but in the heart, Wogaman says, 'is our ability to lay other things aside in order to confront the enormous challenges facing us as a community. We are a public community, and we are going to be public-spirited citizens because God cares about the city and all the people who dwell within it.'⁷³ Wogaman argues that the prophet is concerned with many areas of human life to proclaim 'thus saith the Lord' and through this proclamation people are 'admonished to take heed.'⁷⁴ The prophetic dimension is about a critique of the powers, focussed upon service, bringing about change in a diversity of areas of human and social life.⁷⁵ The church is called to make a difference in culture and Wogaman explains how we are constantly threatened to give in to the conflicting values and assaults on our religious commitments to hold on to faith and accommodate to culture.

Poetic preaching, according to Walter Brueggemann, is daring speech in which a new world is voiced.⁷⁶ The poet speaks against a prose world with a reduced understanding of truth, accommodated to the 'reason of this age', a world that is 'organized in settled formulae'. Poetic speech, on the other hand, 'is the ready, steady, surprising proposal that the real world, in which God invites us to live, is not the one made available by the rulers of this age.' Freedom, healing, doxology, obedience and missional imagination are key-words in the kind of poetic preaching, which Brueggemann challenges preachers to adopt. These themes explore the boundary between this world and the world to come, in the incongruity of the hope of the gospel versus the lack of healing, communion,

73. J. P. Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love. Prophetic Preaching in a Broken World*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 120–127.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

75. Wogaman considers four areas of human existence in which the preachers can open a window, a perspective upon life in the light of the kingdom: politics, economics, racial and ethnic issues, and the family, see *Ibid.*, pp. 57–74.

76. W. Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet. Daring speech for proclamation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 3–11.

obedience and freedom in the Christian community.

In that situation of fearful, yet hopeful, reductionism, the preacher speaks another language, a language not frontal but subtle, a voice not assaulting but surprising, speech not predictable but faithful in its daring. [...] Our lives wait in the balance, hoping, yearning for the promissory, transforming word of the gospel. [...] We have only the word, but the word will do. It will do because it is true that the poem shakes the empire, that the poem heals and transforms and rescues, that the poem enters like a thief in the night and gives new life, fresh from the word and from nowhere else.⁷⁷

The preacher, in Brueggemann's conception, is called to break loose the congregation 'with alternative modes of speech [...] when heard in freedom, assaults imagination and pushes out the presumed world in which most of us are trapped.'⁷⁸

SHAPE OF THE SERMON: DRAWING FROM THE COMING KINGDOM The sermon conceptualises God's Word in terms of God's coming kingdom. The Reformed confessions state that in preaching 'the Kingdom is opened and closed'.⁷⁹ Christ is ultimately present as final Judge. His future kingdom is present proleptically when the joy of the coming Lord and his Kingdom is celebrated and it stirs the ethical thrust to act according to the reign of Christ. In the actual sermon existential and ultimate categories dominate: (1) God's activity is mainly his future speech determining the ultimate outcome of the battle between good and evil and the destination of creation. (2) Human experience is placed in the light of eternity accordingly. (3) The gospel narrative fits this apocalyptic drama in the announcement of the Kingdom and the present reign of Jesus as Lord. (4) Scripture is interpreted accordingly. The Scriptural text testifies to this future reality of the Kingdom beyond the boundaries of time and space.

In the sermon God's saving activity is predominantly conceptualised as future activity regarding the ultimate destination of humankind, the final redemption of the created order and the victory of good over evil forces that strive against God's purpose for creation. It stages the drama between God and his adversary, the meta-narrative of God's creation in the battle against, as St. Paul puts it, 'the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph 6: 12). God's activity is not conceptualised either against or in terms of but beyond human experience and the apparent stage at which world-history takes place.

77. Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, pp. 141–142.

78. Ibid., p. 3. See also W. Brueggemann, 'Preaching as Reimagination' *Theology Today*, 52 (1995):3.

79. See, for instance, the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 83 and 84. Cf. Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 337.

The human condition plays a role in this divine drama of the battle between good and evil. Both human activity—with its ethical and political dimensions—and the ultimate meaning of human existence are placed in the light of eternity. Human existence is both subject and object in the drama of God's creation. As subjects, humans are summoned to take sides. Either for or against Christ the King. The Kingdom opens to those who believe, and is closed to those who resist the Lord's claim. Believers are summoned to act according to Christ's Kingdom, to strive for justice, to give themselves in service and to obey his rule of love. In the end, the human condition itself is object of redemption. It is God who heals, who restores, who promises a new heaven and earth and virtually nothing can be done by humans to add to their salvation in the end of time. Human existence has a distinct finality, namely the union with Christ in the world to come. Until then humans are in a state of pilgrimage, a people *in via*, 'resident aliens', as Hauerwas and Willimon have put it provocatively.⁸⁰

The Jesus narrative is placed within the broader eschatological framework. Christ is present in the preaching of the gospel, or as Rudolf Bultmann argues, Christ is present as 'contemporary kerygmatic and eschatological locus of God's saving activity.'⁸¹ Cross and resurrection are not mere historical facts, but they are raised to 'cosmic dimensions', to an eschatological event. With this

Bultmann means neither "an event of the past to which one looks back," that is a historical event, nor a future apocalyptic occurrence, but an "event in time and beyond time insofar as it is constantly present wherever it is understood in its significance, that is, for faith."⁸²

So Bultmann could say that 'in the preaching of the Christian Church the eschatological event will ever again become present and does become present ever and again in faith.'⁸³

Finally, the Scriptures testify to the eschatological reality of a new heaven and earth. The biblical text in all its genres—prophetic, poetic, narrative or letter—represent the eschatological divine speech, transcending the historical realities the texts are referring to in the first sense. The Scriptures disclose God's word from 'beyond'. They do not transmit God's historic speech in the past, nor provide us with a paradigm for God's current speech in the present. The Scriptures contain the 'myths' that explore the ultimate meaning of existence, and disclose the promissory nature of the gospel: the promise of God's eternal realm and the final renewal of his creation.

80. S. Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens. Life in the Christian Colony*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

81. Kay, *Christus Praesens*, p. 93.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

IMPLIED AUDIENCE: AGENTS IN GODS CASE AGAINST EVIL The preaching of ultimate reality including the Last Judgement should motivate and encourage people, rather than frighten them. 'It is a message of joy ... and must not be reduced to a threat.'⁸⁴ The encounter with God in the apocalyptic dynamic is mainly paranetic, according to Walbrunn.

The paranetic preaching of judgement must clarify that human beings are actually and existentially protected, and that they are moving towards Christ, the One who has come to save and restore the world.⁸⁵

Although the preaching of the Last Judgement is a very pronounced instance of the apocalyptic dynamic, it is helpful to take this as an example to illustrate the type of audience that is implied.

The audience is neither reminded of the past, nor captured in the present, rather pointed towards the ultimate and decisive future of the coming Kingdom, to become part of the struggle between God and his adversary. Two tensions arise in the expectation of the final Judgement to which the preaching event the hearer's minds directs. The first tension is between the realisation and expectation of the Kingdom. The audience is summoned to obey Christ, to participate in justice and bring peace, to fulfill the mission of Christ's Church in the World, and to live as citizens of the Kingdom that is in heaven. On the other hand, however, we are called to expect the Kingdom to be coming as a thief in the night, without our efforts, and to be prepared to welcome the Bridegroom (Matt 25: 1–13). In the eschatological dynamic the audience, on the one hand, is called to obedience to the rule of Christ to live according to the coming Kingdom, and, on the other hand, to trust his promise and to wait for his coming. In the apocalyptic dynamic politics and ethics are captured in a tension with unconditional expectation.

The second tension that involves the audience is between fear and joy in the expectation of the Kingdom. On the one hand, the audience is invited to live in the joy of the anticipation of restauration in the midst of suffering and brokenness. Experiences of abuse of power, injustice, sorrow and shame are fundamentally interrupted by the celebration of a hoped-for new earth, the foretaste of a complete union with Christ. On the other hand, expectation comes with the fear of God's wrath—an important theme in the message of the Old

84. P. Walbrunn, *Der Gerichtsgedanke in der Verkündigung. Eine Untersuchung zur Wirkungsgeschichte des biblischen Gerichtsgedanken am Beispiel der Zeitschrift Der Prediger und Katechet sowie ausgewählter Evangelienperikopen der erneuerten Leseordnung*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 201.

85. Ibid., p. 209.

	kerugmatic (past-aspect)	interpretative (present-aspect)	apocalyptic (future-aspect)
religious function	representing God's speech in the past	interpreting God's current speech	anticipating God's eschatological speech
image of the preacher	herald apostle witness	pastor conversation-partner performer	prophet poet priest
conceptual- ity of the sermon	God's redemptive and unique actions in Christ	analogies between the human condition and the biblical texts	human existence in the light of the Kingdom
implied audience	sharing in the Christ-event	experiencing grace in the present	acting for the coming Kingdom

Table 3.1 Religious dynamics in preaching

Testament's prophets—and his right judgement. This fear makes us tremble in front of the King who is coming to claim his Kingdom.⁸⁶

Preaching should not become too political yet the expectation of the Lord's future creates a critical norm—not to push party and temporary political ideas but the perspective of God's Kingdom—and its holiness puts history into perspective, including our own age.⁸⁷

3.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The three religious dynamics are ideal or basic. Real preaching, though, does not occur as solely kerugmatic, interpretative or apocalyptic. In homiletical literature, let alone in the actual preaching event, there is an interplay between all three of them. The three dynamics that I reconstructed in the previous sections do not exclude each other but single out different aspects of the divine-human encounter in the preaching event. Obviously, these aspects are only rudimentary introduced and need further development. It may be concluded, however, that the idea of 'divine-human dynamics' in preaching yields an adequate theological

86. Thomas Long suggests the categories of warning, worship and hope for all. These categories have a partly overlap with expectation, realisation, joy and fear, but approach the matter from the preacher's point of view. See T. G. Long, 'Preaching Apocalyptic Literature'. *Review and Expositor*, 90 (1993):3, pp. 379–381.

87. J. Gunning jr., 'De Prediking van de Toekomst des Heren [Preaching the Lord's future]'. in: A. de Lange and L. Mietus, editors, *Gunning. Het Kruis des Verlossers (1861). De Prediking van de Toekomst des Heren (1888) Serie Klassiek Licht*. (Nederlands Dagblad, 2008).

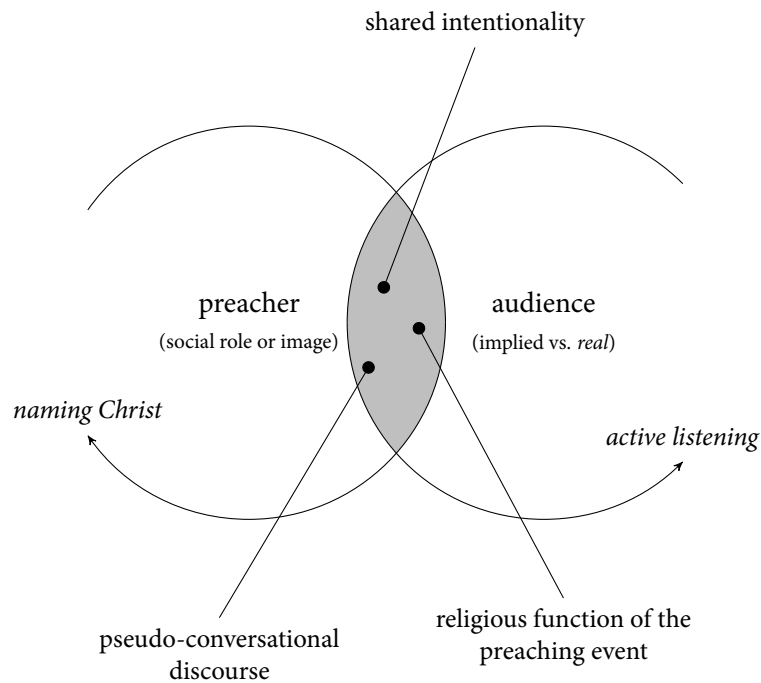


Figure 3.1 Sensitizing concepts for empirical research

sensitizing concept to guide the empirical research of sermon reception. Though table 3.1 presents a pre-empirical analysis of the religious dynamics in preaching, the various aspects and dimensions give an impression of how, in homiletics, the presence of God in preaching is conceptualised. In the previous chapter we have seen that preaching is an interactive phenomenon between social subjects, preachers and audiences. This chapter adds another dimension: the religious functions or religious dynamics of preaching. Both chapters emphasise the diversity of roles of the preacher and the audience. Three aspects create the overlap of the two larger movements of speaking and listening: the shared intentionality between preacher and audience (section 2.4.2), the pseudo-conversational discourse of the sermon (section 2.4.1) and the religious dynamics of the preaching event (Chapter 3). These three concepts give us an impression of the substantive area in which theory is generated.

Figure 3.1 thus presents the substantive area in terms of the sensitizing concepts that have been developed in Chapter 2 and 3. The figure shows two movements. The first turn in the conversation is a movement of 'naming Christ', according to the various divine-human dynamics of a kerugmatic, analogical or future

presence of Christ in the preaching event. This movement is preacher-related and depends on the social relationship with the audience (see section 2.4.2) or image (see table 3.1) of the preacher. The second movement consists of the various levels, degrees or types of activity on the part of the listeners (see section 2.4.3). The audience-related movement is characterised by the implied audience (according to the various dynamics: expecting, remembering, and analogies to experience) versus the actual or real audience.⁸⁸

The substantive area for empirical research is demarcated by the overlap between the conversational turns of the preacher and the audience. In the overlap of naming Christ by the preacher and listening behaviour discourse emerges, shared intentionalities are created, and the religious function of the preaching event can be explored. So the three sensitizing concepts for empirical research are precisely those that demarcate the gray area between the preachers movement and the supposed activity of the audience:

1. *shared intentionality*: what are preacher and audience interacting about? How does it shape the reactions of the audience? What does it mean for the 'effects' of the sermon?
2. *pseudo-conversational discourse*: how do listeners perceive or reflect upon the preaching event within the liturgical setting and what kind of social act is preaching from their point of view?
3. *the religious function of preaching*: What does hearing sermons religiously mean to listeners? What divine-human dynamic is at work in hearing a sermon? Do listeners have any awareness of the presence of Christ or God speaking to them? How do they reconstruct the religious function in their conversations about hearing a sermon?

The dynamic or energetic power of the divine Word is central in understanding the effectiveness of preaching. Communication, rhetoric, reception-theoretical approaches are basic though.⁸⁹

88. The implied (or potential) audience is the audience from the perspective of the sender or the message; the actual or real audience concerns the audience as it is actually receiving. See for these distinctions in audience studies, McQuail, *Audience Analysis*, pp. 45–53. Also see, section 3.1.

89. J. Cornelius-Bundschuh, *Die Kirche des Wortes. Zum evangelischen Predigt- und Gemeindeverständnis*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), pp. 11–13.

PART II

Methodical Interlude

4

GENERATING HOMILETICAL THEORY

4.1 MANUFACTURING THEOLOGICAL IDEAS ABOUT DATA

Generating theory is the hallmark of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM). Despite the many publications that discuss GTM, only a few give a clear and concise definition of its methodical essence. I take my lead from Glaser's, probably most authoritative, work on GTM, his 1978 book *Theoretical Sensitivity*.¹ The following sentence gives a fair summary—that is, shared by many adherents of Grounded Theory, despite the plurality of views on its methodological claims:

Grounded theory is ideational; it is a sophisticated and careful method of idea manufacturing. The conceptual idea is its essence. [...] The best way to produce is to *think* about one's data to generate ideas.²

This sentence provides an elegant *methodical* description of what goes on in theory formation: idea manufacturing. The methodological tensions between the so-called 'postivist' and 'interpretative' versions of GTM³ have been much debated.⁴ As Charmaz puts it: 'We *construct* our grounded theories through

1. This book is cited in almost any publication on GTM. Glaser's later and sometimes very polemical publications, notably B. G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis. Emergence vs Forcing*. (Sociology Press, 1992); B. G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory. Issues and Discussions*. (Sociology Press, 1998), are neglected by many writers, yet *Theoretical Sensitivity* belongs—as *Discovery's* twin—to the canonical literature on the method.

2. B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity. Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. (Sociology Press, 1978), p. 9.

3. See K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 125–128, also K. Charmaz, 'Grounded Theory. Objectivist and Constructivist Methods'. in: N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, editors, *Handbook of Qualitative Research. Second Edition*. (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

4. Cf. A. Bryant, 'A Constructive/ist Response to Glaser'. *Forum Qualitative Social Research. Online Journal*, 4 (2003):1 (URL: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0301155>); B. G. Glaser, 'Constructivist Grounded Theory?' *Forum Qualitative Social Research. Online*

our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. [...] any theoretical rendering offers an *interpretative* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.’⁵ On the whole, the elegance of Glaser’s verb ‘manufacturing’ may help to overcome these difficulties methodically: what are we doing when generating, discovering, or constructing grounded theories? We manufacture ideas.

In the introductory chapter I discussed the context of discovery—the ‘what’ and the ‘why’—of researching sermon reception. The present chapter is about the ‘how’ of research, its context of justification. The context of justification argues for the legitimacy of procedures, analyses and results of research, or, as Hans-Georg Ziebertz puts it, ‘the context of justification examines how a problem is methodically examined. It is here that systematic and controlled work takes place. It is governed by rules i.e. along exactly laid out steps.’⁶ The context of justification is not a neutral, value-free environment in which (mainly statistical) procedures produce an account of hard facts but there is a continuous interaction between researcher and object of research. This chapter is an account of how this interaction has taken place in this study and how it shaped the generation of a theory of sermon reception.

Theory formation is manufacturing ideas about data. I elaborate this statement in three steps. First, I consider the role and nature of the data, since ‘grounded’ entails that ideas are *about data*. (section 4.2). Next, I explain the ‘cyclic process’⁷ of GTM, its procedures and methods that guarantee the systematic *manufacturing of ideas* (section 4.3). These two steps lead to a third. The ideas that are manufactured for the purpose of practical theology or empirical homiletics are *empirical-theological ideas* about data (section 4.4). I do not intend to give a full description of all Grounded Theory methods and procedures—that has been done by others far better for more general research purposes. Yet with the third step, I present my own methodological contribution and I propose an theological extension to the emerging method of Grounded Theory that may be carried further into continuing research.

Journal, 2004 (2002) (URL: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0203125>).

5. Charmaz, *Constructing*, p. 10.

6. H.-G. Ziebertz, ‘Empirical Methodology and Normativity’, in: J. A. van der Ven and M. Scherer-Rath, editors, *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 294.

7. The notion ‘cyclic process’ is somewhat paradoxical, since a cycle represents a re-occurring of phases while a process denotes two or more subsequent phases yet GTM is exactly the combination of the two: phases that reoccur yet in a particular ordering. See also, Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 10–12 and Glaser’s five S’s: ‘Doing grounded theory is subsequent, sequential, simultaneous, serendipitous and scheduled...’, cf. Glaser, *Doing*, p. 15.

4.2 IDEAS ARE 'ABOUT DATA'

Though all empirical research grounds analysis in data, not all empirical research is about generating conceptual ideas. Testing research departs from preconceived concepts, and qualitative data analysis (QDA) presents rich descriptions of respondents in various situated contexts. The former is done in quantitative research, the latter in ethnographical studies. What does it mean to ground conceptual ideas in data? What about data, how much data, and what role does sampling play in Grounded Theory? Since the main driving force of GTM is the constant comparison of incidents (see further section 4.3), the analytical question is even more important: what is meant by 'incidents of data' and how do they relate to the interviews on the one hand and to the developing theory on the other?

4.2.1 Sampling: how much data?

'Theoretical sampling results in an ideational sample, not a representative sample. It is about an area of interest, a conceptual about, not a numbered about.'⁸ In terms of my study, the area of interest is the field of homiletic interaction and divine-human dynamics. In this area, as we will see, the conceptual about is 'getting religiously involved'. How *many* of them and distributed along what face-sheet variables (such as gender, education etc.) are succesful in getting religiously involved is a matter of 'subsequent survey research which aggregates and distributes, once the grounded theory is generated.'⁹ Therefore, this study is based upon a small sample of 15 listeners.¹⁰

Obviously, a sample of only 15 listeners does not sustain representative statements about the entire population of listeners in general. In the light of the massive numbers of respondents in previous studies¹¹ the range of this study

8. Glaser, *Doing*, p. 159.

9. Ibid.

10. See table 4.3 on page 96.

11. 6000 German listeners in the study of the Hannover research group Cf. K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigten. Analysen und Grundausswertung*. Volume 1, Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung. (München: Kaiser, 1980); K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören. Band II. Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hörern. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*. (München: Kaiser, 1982), Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung; 260 American listeners in the project 'Listening to listeners' Cf. J. S. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners. Homiletical Case Studies*. Volume 1, Channels of Listening. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004); M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005); 246 and 201 Dutch listeners in the studies of Stark and Schaap respectively Cf. C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005); H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image*,

seems negligible for any generalised statements. But representativity is not the issue for generating theory. The aim of sampling is getting enough incidents to substantiate categories and their properties, the conceptual ideas. The scope of Grounded Theory is not about a particular population, such as Protestant hearers, but its breadth is conceptual. Grounded Theory is not about a group of listeners, nor about a particular tradition or type of Church, but about processes, stages, and dimensions. Further, since sampling is about gathering new incidents to compare and to code, the issue is not how much listeners are being interviewed, but how many incidents are being collected. Since one listener in one interview generates more than one incident of sermon-listening, the amount of incidents (705) is much higher than the amount of interviews (22).¹² Therefore the unit of analysis is not the individual listener (as with ethnography) but the incidents that account for listening behaviour. In other words, sampling is done to generate enough incidents to construct a theory. When saturation of categories occurs, sampling ceases.¹³ For Grounded Theory, data collection must be kept to a minimum.¹⁴

Table 4.1 on the next page presents the four rounds of sampling in this study. These four samples correspond to the various cycles of coding: open, selected, and theoretical coding.¹⁵ In total, I interviewed listeners in four congregations that—at the moment of interviewing still¹⁶—belong to the Dutch Reformed Church (represented by A to D in the first column of the table). In the first analytic phase of open coding, I interviewed five listeners from two different parishes (A and B) in a middle-range city of the Netherlands: an ordinary parish-church (Ronald and Deborah) and a mentality-like congregation (Caroline, Marc and Judith)—in terms of the church order, a ‘special’ congregation. Usually a ‘special’ congregation is characterised by a high level of commitment of the members to the values of the church; the members of an ordinary parish are less determined about the theological identity of their church. The initial sample of five interviews provided me with enough incidents¹⁷ to start coding and to find a tentative core variable ‘religious connection.’¹⁸

In the second analytic phase, selective coding, I took two samples. First, I interviewed the five listeners for a second time and contacted four new respondents

Personality and Affective State. (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

12. For these figures, see table 4.3.

13. About saturation, see below, section 5.4.

14. Glaser, *Doing*, Ch. 10.

15. See further section 4.3.

16. The union of the Dutch Reformed Church, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church was realised in 2004.

17. See table 4.3 on page 96 for the figures on the amount of sermon-listening incidents. The initial sample of five interviews generated 245 sermon listening incidents.

18. About the coding process, see 5.2.

	open coding <i>initial sample</i>	selective coding <i>sample 2</i> <i>sample 3</i>		theoretical coding <i>sample 4</i>
A	Caroline	Caroline (2)		
A	Marc	Marc (2)		
A	Judith	Judith (2)		
B	Ronald	Ronald (2)		
B	Deborah	Deborah (2)		
B		Lydia	Lydia (2)	
A		Eric	Eric (2)	
A		Shana	Shana (2)	
A		Jonathan	Jonathan (2)	
C			John	
C			Elly	
D				Anny
D				William
D				Grace
D				Kathy

Table 4.1 Sampling cycles

from the two parishes (Lydia, Eric, Shana, and Jonathan). Further, I interviewed those four listeners for a second time and contacted two new respondents (John and Elly) from another mainstream, a largely orthodox parish in one of the larger cities (C). These two samples helped me to saturate the emerging categories, to discover their properties and start integrating the memos in a theoretical framework. The three categories of getting religiously involved, namely experiential, attentive, and existential involvement, gradually took shape. In the third phase of theoretical coding I sorted the various memos and codes into one analytic framework. In sorting the three stages of opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and actualising faith emerged. A fourth sample (Anny, William, Grace, and Kathy), taken from a new congregation (D), generated more sermon-listening incidents to compare with the constructed theory and helped to integrate the substantial concepts through theoretical codes like *religious process* of listening, *ways of* identification, *modes* and *dimensions of* actualising faith.¹⁹

19. For the phases of selective and theoretical coding, see further 5.3 and 5.4 respectively.

4.2.2 The units of analysis: what kind of data?

First there is data, then there is analysis. Between sampling data and analytically coding the data, however, the question concerning the nature of the data is pressing: what is being coded? In this section I take the 'sermon listening incident' (SLI) as primary unit of data-analysis. Data consists of these incidents, fragments of transcribed interviews that refer to a preaching experience or aspect of sermon reception. The sermon-listening incident keeps the analyst focussed on the original research intention.²⁰ This study is based upon 705 incidents on the practice of hearing sermons.²¹

Several rules and suggestions exist to fragmentize data, such as interviews, into meaningful units before coding.²² The advices to create such meaningful units range from cutting the data into very formal units—such as: every interview-turn creates a new segment—to leaving the data very unstructured, as in so-called line-by-line coding.²³ Since Grounded Theory is 'a comparative study of incidents'²⁴ the primary unit for analysis is an 'incident'. Incidents could be incidents of anything but in research they are selected to be incidents 'of something' within the boundaries of the substantive area. So Grounded Theory is not about units (people, groups, institutions) but about processes (or other theoretical codes, such as contexts, conditions, or types).²⁵ Formal interviews, however, have the tendency to keep the researcher thinking about a particular person—the respondent, rather than about the practice in which this respondent is engaged in. His experience and practice, however, is the eventual object of research. The individual listener is important, but insofar his or her listening-experiences provide information about the substantive area of research. So I created segments from every part of the interview that was about the listener's experience of sermon listening. The sermon-listening-incident (SLI) was born. Sermon listening incidents are very diverse, both in length and quality.

Next, I coded these SLI's in order of appearance in the interview.²⁶ These incidents range from past experiences that are being remembered during the

20. Cf. Glaser's first analytic question for coding, Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, p. 57. On incidents, also see Glaser, *Doing*, p. 140.

21. See for its distribution among respondents and the various types of incidents, table 4.3 on page 96.

22. For the term 'meaningful unit', see F. Wester and I. Maso, 'Het analyseproces in kwalitatief onderzoek', in: F. Wester and I. Maso, editors, *Moeilijkheden en mogelijkheden. Het omgaan met problemen in de praktijk van de kwalitatieve analyse*. (Amsterdam: SISWO, 1991), p. 15.

23. For line-by-line coding, see Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 50–53.

24. Ibid., p. 53.

25. See Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 109–113.

26. This procedure fits Glaser's dictum 'all is data' better though I could also have added SLI's from other sources, rather than from the formal interview setting. See for 'all is data', Glaser, *Doing*, pp. 8–9.

conversation to impressions of recent experiences with sermon listening; from very general ideas about what a good sermon is supposed to be, to quite concrete examples or illustrations from sermons; from very positive to rather negatively assessed preaching experiences; and from intensive personal accounts to speculative reports of how others might have experienced the sermon.

Different kinds of data give the analyst different views or vantage points from which to understand a category and to develop its properties; these different views [are] called *slices of data*.²⁷

Sermon-listening-incidents are potentially rich slices of data.²⁸ The main purpose of interviewing is to generate as many incidents of sermonic experiences as possible. Depending on the depth and quality of the interview the pieces of data are quantitatively and qualitatively very different. Some consist of a few lines and thus rather limited quantitatively, some incidents are too much forced by the interviewer and therefore qualitatively rather poor; others contain a rich variety of interrelated issues, others go on for paragraphs continually indicating one particular category. The researcher takes every incident as it is, a slice of data, he determines its quality and quantity and codes it accordingly. The incident of listening-experience is not a full report, an accurate description nor a complete sermonic experience. Instead, incidents have a measure of vagueness, they are incomplete, and sometimes very implicitly stated. Nonetheless the incident is qualified as a reliable source for generating conceptual theory. Let us explore these features of incompleteness, vagueness, and reliability in order to take the data as what they are: a series of reported incidents of sermon listening.

Take for instance the three incidents in table 4.2 on the following page. These fragments illustrate how sermon-listening-incidents are *incomplete* reports. They do not give an accurate picture of the entire listening experience. They are subconsciously reconstructed during the interview-session. For Grounded Theory purposes, incomplete reports are not problematic. Since accurate or thick description is not the aim of this study, the lack of accuracy and the incompleteness of the data does not generate major methodological problems. On the contrary, the researcher is 'breaking down descriptions to conceptual fragments.'²⁹ Next, these incidents have a degree of *vagueness*. Sometimes the incidents are not very concrete (e.g. incident 3). Sometimes respondents

27. B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), p. 65.

28. For rich data, see Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 13–14.

29. Glaser, *Doing*, p. 149, see also pp. 139–141 and Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 49–52, 62–64 on conceptual fragments. On the difference between description and conceptualisation, see B. G. Glaser, *Conceptualization contrasted with Description. The Grounded Theory Perspective, volume 1*. (Sociology Press, 2001).

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- 1 Last Sunday, the minister spoke about the resurrection, that passage from Paul about the seed, like seed comes up. [...] And then he said: I wish I brought some seed with me. Than I thought: well, I wish you'd done it! Something to visualise. I never forget that sermon. Because he explained it like, you know, you would never believe that a beautiful flower would grow from such seed. But in fact, the resurrection will be just like that. The Lord Jesus Christ is the first and that's what we see, we do know it, because it's some kind of natural law that comes back all the time. When something dies, something new takes its place. Well, that was an eyeopener for me. Because the preacher took this example, it became so lively.
 - 2 The last sermon, with Easter, was from all four evangelists and the suffering of Christ and his resurrection [resurrection narrative]. Well, I find that interesting. Because I am also someone, you know, I have something with history. Like, oh, how great does it fit together. Is Luke the earliest? Oh, Mark. [...] I like it the way the minister presents it together. I tell him, well it touched me. It makes me think. Because those people who wrote the gospels were also human beings.
 - 3 What did the minister say last time, let's see, he said something like: 'I have to include myself here'. See, actually he asked himself: did I think about Christ today? You know, I have that too. Many times, I think that myself as well. Look, I have been so busy with all kinds of everyday stuff.
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Table 4.2 Three sermon-listening-incidents (sli's)

talk generally about their attitudes towards preaching and generate only vague incidents. One respondent, for instance, started the interview by apologizing that she had not heard the sermon last Sunday because she had to teach Sunday-school. She forgot to inform me before I came to visit her for the interview. In such a situation the researcher is faced with the question whether to stop the interview because of issues of reliability or to continue the interview and talk about other listening experiences acknowledging that a certain vagueness creeps into the data.³⁰ Finally, though incomplete and sometimes very vague, the incidents of listening experiences are yet *reliable* sources to conceptualize the main concern of those who participate in the practice of sermon listening. Methodically, one could study the sermon-listening-incidents as meta-data, data about data. Comparing these incidents helps to understand their quality as sermon-listening incidents and thus explicate their reliability as data. By doing so, I found five properties. An SLI is a report, it refers to listening as practiced religion, it has a degree of personalisation, a level of specificity, and a temporal

30. Concerning the issue of vagueness, Glaser distinguishes between four types of data: baseline (the best description a participant can offer), properline (what the participant thinks is proper to tell), interpreted (told by a trained professional), and vaguing out (the actual data is none of the researcher's business). Cf. Glaser, *Doing*, p. 9.

index.³¹

REPORT-CHARACTER This property of the incident of sermon reception can appear in two modes: 1. the mode of retention, a rather objectively expressed report; 2. the mode of interpretation, a rather personalised account of the sermon's impact, its meaning being explicitly stated by the listener. Many incidents include both modes. As reports, sermon-listening-incidents are not direct feedback, given during the sermon, but reconstructions afterwards.³²

RELIGIOUS REFERENCE The incident indicates a religious reference ranging from 'explicitly stated' to 'implicitly assumed'. The listener talks about God, Christ, church and faith. On the other hand the incident may assume a religious attitude without making them explicit by referring to them. Indirect references to God ('He is trying to speak to you') or references that only make sense when they are put in a religious framework. Here my own theoretical perspective as researcher, the theological perspective that is articulated in the previous chapters on sensitizing the substantive area, and the ascribed normative beliefs that are embedded in the practice are at the foreground of analysis.³³

PERSONALISATION The aspect of personalisation refers to the measure in which the listener stays close to his own experiences or moves beyond the personal and talks, in a more generalized way, in terms of 'third personal' experiences. The listener reports that he thinks that people are touched or offended by the sermon, without allowing the interviewer to come closer when he is invited to personalise the incident.

LEVEL OF SPECIFICITY The incident represents a certain level of specificity. Three values are relevant: the incident is (a) a general; (b) a specific; or (c) a very specific incident. A general incident is an incident in which the listener talks about listening to sermons abstracted from time and place with utterances like 'I like sermons that help me to better understand the

31. In fact these properties have been generated following the procedures of Grounded Theory. After open coding I came back to the data to ask again the question what I had been coding, from which these properties of the sermon-listening-incident emerged. These properties may lead to a more comprehensive grounded theory of generating practical-theological data.

32. For direct, technically induced feedback during listening, see H. Schwier and S. Gall, *Predigt Hören. Befunde und Ergebnisse der Heidelberger Umfrage zur Predigtrezeption*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

33. On practice and normative beliefs, see M. Volf, 'Theology for a Way of Life' in: M. Volf and D. C. Bass, editors, *Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Scriptures.’ In a specific incident the listener talks about preaching in relation to his congregation or preacher. He does not refer to particular sermonic instances, but talks about his experiences of preaching in this congregation and this preacher. In a very specific incident the listener talks about experiences with a particular sermon. This sermon can have become part of the listener’s history and can have made a lasting impression on the listener or this sermon can be the most recently heard sermon.

TEMPORAL INDEX A sub-property of specificity consists of the history of an SLI. An SLI is about a very recently heard sermon or a sermon that was in the past and is still exerting a certain influence on the listener. During an interview a listener sometimes recalls a very memorable sermon, as one listener tells about the sermon preached on his weddingday that became very important for him in one particular period of his life—years later. Listening-incidents are very fresh, concerning last Sunday’s sermon, or have a history and can be part of the hearer’s ‘sermonic memory’.³⁴

These properties of ‘the incident of sermon reception’ indicate the measure of the data’s validity. They helped me to understand what fragments in the interviews were more valid in the analysis than others. For instance: very specific incidents, personal accounts, explicit religious references are more valid to be conceptualised for practical-theological purposes than those incidents that are very general and hardly personalised. However, this does not imply methodically that general incidents, third-person accounts, or fragments with implicit religious references cannot be used in the analysis at all. However, bias and interpretation on the part of the researcher are more likely to enter when analysis is purely based upon general incidents.³⁵ The diversity and amount of the 705 sermon-listening incidents is displayed in table 4.3 on page 96.

A few hints in the previous pages revealed how I departed from what Glaser has called ‘classic’ Grounded Theory. Since these departures mainly concern gathering and analysis of the data it is appropriate to address them here. First, despite the glaserian dictum “all is data” I confined myself to formal interviewing.³⁶ Formal interviewing is rather common in qualitative data analysis, but strictly speaking, listing respondents and having a sample of a certain amount of respondents is unnecessary for Grounded Theory. Secondly, I taped and transcribed the interviews, again a common practice in qualitative research,

34. Although expected, this response is not listed in Mulligan and Allen, *Believing in Preaching*, Ch. 9.

35. For bias and disabling bias in Grounded Theory research, see Glaser, *Conceptualisation contrasted with Description*.

36. *Ibid.*, Ch. 11–12.

though 'theoretical completeness only requires that notes are written down after an interview'.³⁷ Thirdly, I used software as a means of data management, first Kwalitan³⁸, later Atlas.ti.³⁹ Software simplifies data storage and retrieval and especially Atlas.ti has advanced functionalities for coding and memoing.⁴⁰ During the phase of sorting and theoretical coding, however, I left the computer and went back to manual work. These departures from Grounded Theory methodology were done to increase the levels of reliability and validity. Formal interviews are conducted according to the accepted standards of qualitative research; recorded and transcribed interviews are more reliable than field-notes; and computer-aided-analysis is more rigid than manual coding. I am aware that 'classic' Grounded Theory does not need structured interview designs, digital recording and computer-assisted analysis of interviews because of its time-consuming nature and possible dangers of forcing the data. Yet the validity of the analysis is better supported.

4.3 MANUFACTURING IDEAS THROUGH COMPARISON AND CODING

Homiletical theory is usually the result of deductive theological reasoning informed by empirical research. In fact, many times theory is assumed rather than articulated. Understandable as it is for practical purposes, 'generating' theory to understand the area of preaching and listening has been of secondary interest. The inductive movement in homiletics started to incorporate empirical data into homiletical theory. For instance, Fred Craddock's *Preaching* (Nashville, 1985) has been permeated with the author's rich experiences of being a life-time preacher. Yet for theory formation in homiletics those data are rather impressionistically rendered. David Buttrick's *Homiletic* (Philadelphia, 1987) departs from a phenomenology of language and he offers an account of moves and structures that incorporates empirical statements about the functioning of the listener's consciousness. To a large extent these intuitions may be right but data

37. Glaser, *Doing*, Ch. 7.

38. See <http://www.kwalitan.net>.

39. See <http://www.atlasti.com>.

40. For the use of software in Grounded Theory research, see M. Lonkila, 'Grounded Theory as an Emerging Paradigm for Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis' in: U. Kelle, editor, *Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis*. (Sage, 1995). – chapter 3; U. Kelle, 'Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis' in: C. Seale et al., editors, *Qualitative Research Practice*. (London: Sage, 2004); U. Kelle, 'Theory Building in Qualitative Research and Computer Programs for the Management of Textual Data'. *Sociological Research Online*, 2004 (1997):12 March (URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/2/1.html>). See also B. G. Glaser, *Description's Remodelling of Grounded Theory Methodology. The Grounded Theory Perspective*, volume 2. (Sociology Press, 2003), Ch. 2 and 3.

	interviews	sermon-listening-incidents (SLI's)		
		general	specific	+personalised
Caroline	2	22	35	31
Marc				
Judith	2	30	11	21
Shana	2	9	10	21
Eric	2	30	13	11
Jonathan	2	33	9	15
Ronald	2	20	10	16
Deborah	2	31	7	11
Lydia	2	34	21	37
John	1	20	11	15
Elly	1	17	8	22
Anny	1	27	6	9
William	1	14	6	12
Grace	1	8	7	8
Kathy	1	9	7	11
15	22	304 +	161 +	240 = 705

Table 4.3 Listeners, interviews, and sermon-listening incidents

generation and conceptualisation has not been done with the methodical rigour that is needed. For Grounded Theory the role of empirical data is foundational. Theorizing about preaching and listening in this fashion starts with empirical data. Data is not impressionistically collected nor intuitively but systematically constructed according to methodological standards. Concepts are the results of coding, and coding is the result of comparing incidents in the data, and incidents are gathered through (participant) observation, field notes and interviewing.

The methodical backbone of Grounded Theory consists of the interrelated methods of constant-comparison and theoretical sampling, with a cycle of coding in between. Incidents of sermon listening are compared to each other and coded. Coding leads to generating new data. Constant-comparing incidents is an inductive mechanism and takes place between incidents, between incidents and codes, and between codes. Comparison leads to coding. Further, theoretical sampling is a deductive method and proceeds from coding. So between comparison and sampling coding takes place. Three cycles of coding—open, selective and theoretical coding—keep going the movement of comparing and sampling. In the following paragraphs I introduce these methodical procedures and Chapter 5 illustrates them in more detail.

4.3.1 Constant-comparison

The constant-comparative method consists of two steps: breaking the data into bits and pieces (incidents) and code these fragments (conceptualisation). The incidents of data are compared to each other and in this constant comparing of incident to new incidents, incidents to codes, and codes to codes, categories and their properties emerge. Constant comparison is the most important procedure to keep the process of conceptualisation going. Essentially it is an inductive procedure. Because new incidents are continuously added, bias and preconception become apparent in comparing these new incidents to the former set of coded fragments. Constant-comparison takes place on three levels: the level of data, the intermediate level between data and concepts, and finally on the level of concepts and categories. First, incidents of data are compared to other incidents of data. From these comparisons codes emerge that indicate various conceptual patterns in the data. Next, on the intermediate level, new incidents are compared to these emerging codes to discover properties of the conceptual pattern. Finally, the various patterns (concepts) are compared to each other in order to find relationships between the concepts and categories.⁴¹

Table 4.4 on the next page lists three incidents of sermon-listening and illustrates how comparison works on the level of the data. These incidents are not randomly chosen. For the sake of validity I selected the incidents on their specificity and temporality.⁴² So from the first three interviews I took the first specific sermon-listening incident about a recently listened sermon. This implies that I skipped some sermon-listening incidents that were too general or about listening-experiences in the past. Since I did not have any codes at my disposal, I compared these incidents and coded them accordingly resulting in a first, tentative list of codes, such as ‘I never forget’, ‘attentive to Scripture’, and ‘imagining resurrection’ (SLI 1). Comparing incident 1 to 2 leads to new codes such as ‘I find that interesting’ and ‘new understanding’, while the incident also indicates how the listener becomes ‘attentive to Scripture’. Next, the codes are tested on new material (through theoretical sampling) and compared to other incidents. Finally, they are compared to each other. To cut the analysis short, it appears that the three expressions with ‘I’ (find interesting, have that too, never forget) indicate how listeners identify with the sermon—a more abstract pattern that emerges from comparison on various levels.

41. See further, Glaser and Strauss, *Discovery*, pp. 105–113. The two upper rows of table 4.5 on page 102 display the three levels of analysis (incident-to-incident, incident-to-concept, and concept-to-concept) according to the three cycles of coding.

42. See the characteristics of SLI’s listed in the previous section, 4.2.2.

Table 4.4 Comparing incidents and open coding

nr	slice of data	coding
1	<p>Last Sunday, the minister spoke about the resurrection, that passage from Paul about the seed, like seed comes up. And then he said: I wish I brought some seed with me. Than I thought: well, I wish you'd done it! Something to visualize. <i>I never forget</i> that sermon. Because <i>he explained it</i> [scripture] like, you know, you would never believe that a beautiful flower would grow from such seed. But in fact, the resurrection will be just like that.</p> <p>The Lord Jesus <i>Christ is the first</i> and that's what we see, we do know it, because it's some kind of natural law that comes back all the time. When something dies, something new takes its place. Well, that was an <i>eye-opener for me</i>. Because the preacher took this example, <i>it became so lively</i> [imagining]</p>	<p>'I never forget', attentive to Scripture</p> <p>imagining resurrection, eyeopener, topic: Christ is the first</p>
2	<p>The last sermon, with Easter, was about all four evangelists and the suffering of Christ and his resurrection [resurrection narrative]. Well, <i>I find that interesting</i>. Because I am also someone, you know, I have something with history. Like, oh, <i>how great does it fit together</i> [new understanding]. Is Luke the earliest? Oh, Mark. [...] I like it the way the minister <i>presents it together</i> [scripture]. I tell him, well it touched me. <i>It makes me think</i>. Because those people who wrote the gospels were also human beings.</p>	<p>'I find that interesting', attentive to Scripture, new understanding, sermon makes me think, resurrection narrative</p>
3	<p>What did the minister say last time, let's see, <i>he said something like: 'I have to include myself here'</i>. See, actually he asked himself: did I think about Christ today? You know, <i>I have that too</i>. Many times, I think that myself as well. Look, I have been so busy with <i>all kinds of everyday stuff</i> [everyday life].</p>	<p>'I have that too', faith in Christ, everyday life, p's self-inclusion in the sermon</p>

Glaser insists on comparing incidents with help of a few general analytic questions yet without theoretical preconception.⁴³ Comparing incidents and coding without preconceived theoretical notions does not imply blunt inductivism because constant-comparison is a reflective method.⁴⁴ I agree with Kathy Charmaz that a 'grounded theory journey relies on *interaction*—emanating from your worldview, standpoints, and situations, arising in the research sites, developing between you and your data, emerging with your ideas, then returning back to the field—or another field, and moving on to conversations with your discipline and substantive fields.'⁴⁵

4.3.2 Coding in cycles

Incidents are coded. But there are various types of codes. Coding helps to move forward from open, initial ideas about the data towards more integrated, theoretical ideas. Methodologists have suggested different models to structure the course of research into several analytic phases. Fred Wester, for instance, distinguishes between four cycles—exploration, specification, reduction, and integration.⁴⁶ Many researchers have adopted the three cycles of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin—open coding, axial coding, selective coding.⁴⁷ In both models sampling and saturation play a role as criteria for moving to the next phase. Yet Heath and Cowly rightly observed that with axial and selective coding Corbin and Strauss moved away from the original position of GTM and forced research into a 'positivistic linearity' of causes and conditions.⁴⁸ So with Judith Holton I distinguish three cycles of research, each depending on the primary type of

43. He stresses this against the method that Strauss and Corbin advocate. Their so-called 'guiding questions' take the strength of constant-comparison away. Cf. A. L. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 73–86.

44. In practical-theology the inductivism is discussed in J. A. van der Ven, 'Die Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse', in: J. A. van der Ven and H.-G. Ziebertz, editors, *Paradigmenentwicklung in der Praktischen Theologie*. Volume 13, (Kampen: Kok, 1993). On the language of 'emergence' see also, U. Kelle, "'Emergence" vs. "Forcing" of Empirical Data? A Crucial Problem of "Grounded Theory" Reconsidered', in: G. Mey and K. Mruck, editors, *Grounded Theory Reader. Historical Social Research Supplement*. (Köln: Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung, 2007).

45. Charmaz, *Constructing*, p. 179.

46. F. Wester, *Strategieën voor kwalitatief onderzoek*. 3rd edition. (Bussum: Coutinho, 1995), pp. 52–73.

47. Cf. Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

48. H. Heath and S. Cowley, 'Developing a Grounded Theory Approach. A comparison of Glaser and Strauss', *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 41 (2004):2, p. 146. For a thorough analysis of the differences between coding procedures in Glaser on the one hand and Strauss and Corbin on the other, see F. Myrick and D. Walker, 'Grounded Theory: An Exploration of Process and Procedure', *Qualitative health research*, 16 (2006):4, pp. 550–557.

coding that takes place: open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding.⁴⁹

In all three cycles constant-comparison is the driving mechanism while theoretical sampling moves the analysis further to another cycle. Comparison and sampling are bridged by coding. Constant comparison leads to conceptual codes and these codes are the basis for sampling new material. The entire process of theory-formation is a movement from the concrete data towards an abstract rendering of the data into conceptual categories. So the coding procedures in Grounded Theory are not meant to summarize the data into small sentences to be glued together in a descriptive rendering of the data. They rather aim for moving away from the concrete level of observations, interviews, and protocols towards a formulation of the conceptual patterns that emerge from studying these observations, interviews and protocols. The coding strategies methodically guarantee that the movement from data to theory can be made. Chapter 5 presents this movement in more detail.

This general methodological movement from concrete data towards abstract theory, however, consists of two methodical moves that are interdependent and take the analysis to a more abstract level. The *first* move is from open coding to selective coding. Initially coding is very open and flexible. During selective coding, however, the researcher focusses upon more specific categories around the core variable. Abstraction increases since coding becomes more specific and less open. This move from open to selective coding takes place 'when the analyst is sure that she has found a core variable.'⁵⁰ The *second* move is from substantive to theoretical coding. Abstraction of the concepts continues to increase for in the third cycle of coding research aims for finding the theoretical connections between the various concepts and their properties.

In the first two cycles of open and selective coding, the codes and concepts are very substantive. They substantially name the processes, dimensions, aspects in the area of research. For instance, in hearing a sermon, religious connections between the listener, the Christian understanding of salvation and the biblical text are shaped. Further, these connections are mental states that concern the listener's faith, and they are shaped in attentive listening and intrapersonal conversations.⁵¹ However, in order to determine how these substantial categories relate to each other is done in the third cycle of coding, theoretical coding. Theory formation takes place in this move from substantive to theoretical coding, when

49. J. A. Holton, 'The Coding Process and Its Challenges', in: K. Charmaz and A. Bryant, editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007). – chapter 13. These terms are taken from Glaser. Though Charmaz speaks about initial in stead of open coding, and focused in stead of selective coding, her approach is similar. Cf. Charmaz, *Constructing*, Ch. 3.

50. Glaser, *Basics*, p. 75. The move from exploration to specification takes place when the core-concepts have been generated, also see Wester, *Strategieën*, pp. 57–58.

51. See further, section 5.2.

the substantial categories and properties become integrated through sorting the memos. Theoretical codes integrate substantial categories. Examples of theoretical codes are types, dimensions, aspects, causes, conditions, modes, degrees, models, and processes.⁵² Glaser explains this move from substantive to theoretical codes as follows:

Substantive codes are the categories and properties of the theory which emerges from and conceptually images the substantive area being researched. [...] In contrast, *theoretical codes* implicitly conceptualise how the substantive codes will relate to each other as a modeled, interrelated, multivariate set of hypotheses in accounting for resolving the main concern [in the substantive area].⁵³

Let us again consider the three incidents in table 4.4 on page 98 to understand these two kinds of coding and the steps between them. First, in all three incidents listeners express their engagement with the sermon: 'I will never forget this sermon' (incident 1), 'I found that very interesting' (incident 2), and 'I have that too' (incident 3). These expressions indicate how listeners identify with the sermon. 'Identification with the sermon' is a substantive concept. Identification refers to a pattern that is apparent in all three incidents, so it deserves the promotion to a central category. New data is selectively coded with this code to further saturate the concept of identification.⁵⁴ Selective coding focusses the researcher on coding for core variables that have emerged during open coding. 'To selectively code for a core variable, then, means that the analyst delimits his coding to only those variables that relate to the core variable in sufficiently significant ways to be used in a parsimonious theory. The core variable becomes a guide to further data collection and theoretical sampling.'⁵⁵

The three incidents, however, do not only indicate the substantial category of identification. Further sampling and comparison shows that the incidents are also related to identification in a more abstract, theoretical way. They also indicate *ways* of identification. Again, consider the three incidents: the imaginative performance of the gospel of Christ's resurrection (incident 1), the exegetical interesting presentation of the resurrection-narratives (incident 2), or the self-inclusion of the preacher in the sermon (incident 3) all account for the way in which identification takes place. Take for instance the latter: the religious personality of the preacher in the performance of the sermon facilitates the religious engagement of the listener. So, *through* the channel of the self-presentation of the

52. Glaser presents three cumulative catalogues of theoretical codes, starting with his list of 18 families with theoretical codes, see Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 73–82. For additional lists, see Glaser, *Doing*, pp. 170–175 and B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Coding. The Grounded Theory Perspective*, volume 3. (Sociology Press, 2005), pp. 17–30.

53. Glaser, *Doing*, p. 163. *Emphasis mine*.

54. See Chapter 9.

55. See Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, p. 61.

	open coding (= substantive coding)	selective coding	theoretical coding
sli	incident-incident	incident-concept	concept-concept
nr	comparison	comparison	comparison
2	interesting		
3	me too	identification with the sermon	
1	always remember		
1	imaginative performance	symbolic-narrative world of the sermon	is a way of
2	exegetical presentation		[identifica- tion]
3	p's self-inclusion	religious personality of the preacher	is a way of [identifica- tion]
	concrete data	<i>towards</i>	abstract theory

Table 4.5 Coding cycles

preacher, identification occurs. This indicates a more theoretical, analytic pattern in the data. The substantial concepts of 'performed religious-personality' and 'identification of the listener' are connected on a more abstract level: 'personality' being a way by which 'identification' takes place.

Theoretical coding is thus about relating two substantial codes into an analytic framework. As theoretical code the notion 'a way of' in the third column of table 4.5 glues together the categories of 'the preacher's religious personality' and 'identification with the sermon'. Table 4.5 presents two *ways of* (theoretical code) identification with the sermon (substantive code 1): through the symbolic-narrative world of the sermon (substantive code 2a) or through the religious personality of the preacher (substantive code 2b). Constant-comparison establishes that with these two the 'ways of identification' are saturated.⁵⁶ Therefore, like substantial codes, theoretical codes also emerge rather than being applied as 'pet-concepts' or pre-empirical ideas to the data.⁵⁷

Coding procedures generate two types of codes, theoretical or concrete (in-vivo). Very theoretical labels are abstract renderings of the data. They may be taken from existing conceptual frameworks or denote a particular theoretical perspective. Take, for instance, labels such as 'the attentiveness of the listener' or

56. See further section 9.3.

57. See Glaser, *Theoretical Coding*.

‘identifying with the sermon’. The advantage of using theoretical terms is their capability of functioning in an analytic framework as context, cause, type or process. As I will show in the next part, attentiveness is a function of perceiving the sermon and identifying is a sub-process within the larger framework of religious involvement. The theoretical notions of attentiveness and identification, however, should not be used too early in the analysis in order to avoid forcing the data into abstract categories. On the other hand, concrete labels help to pattern out the data vividly and specifically, without running into abstraction too soon. These labels are also called ‘in-vivo’ labels. They are directly taken from the language of the participant. For example: ‘the sermon made me think’ and ‘here-and-now listening’. It is preferable to capture as much in-vivo codes as possible during open coding in order to stay close to the respondent’s perspective. Further, in-vivo terms closely fit the perspective of the participants in the field.⁵⁸

Finally, the coding cycles relate to the previous procedure of constant comparison as follows: each coding cycle consists of a particular type of comparison and moves conceptualisation forward to an abstract, theoretical rendering of the data. The two bottom rows of table 4.5 show this relationship. During open coding, incidents are compared to incidents. This comparison leads to the first set of initial codes. When data is selectively coded, the incidents are compared to these initial codes in order to specify those codes, to develop them into categories, and to saturate their properties. Finally, the substantive categories thus generated are compared to each other, when memos are sorted and the theory becomes integrated through the emerging theoretical framework. Theoretical coding takes place when memos on substantive categories are compared to each other. With every step, theory formation moves away from the level of the concrete data to a higher level of abstraction. Hence the researcher raises the conceptual level of the theory, from very concrete to very theoretical.⁵⁹

4.3.3 Sampling and Memoing

Comparing and coding are the two major forces that drive conceptualisation, the manufacturing of ideas from concrete data towards theoretical statements about the data. In addition, I mention two other sets of procedures. First, *theoretical sampling of new incidents* is a deductive strategy to find new incidents in the data to verify the emerging conceptual hypotheses about categories and their relationships. In the previous section I dealt with sampling already.⁶⁰ I introduced the four samples of this study, one initial sample and three subsequent theoretical samples. Here the deductive nature of sampling must be stressed:

58. On in-vivo coding see, Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 55–57.

59. See for conceptual levels, Glaser, *Doing*, p. 135.

60. See table 4.1 on page 89.

the emerging concepts (coding) drive the quest for new incidents. Sampling is a deductive procedure, based upon the categories in development. For instance, in case of identification, new sermon-listening-incidents are sampled to find new properties of identification, such as third-person engagement. Many critics challenge Grounded Theory because of its sheer inductivism, while they overlook the deductive mechanism of sampling that balances the research process.

Secondly, the three methods of *memoing*, *sorting*, and *writing* aim to capture the ideas in memos, to relate them to each other through sorting the memos and to write the integrating framework in order to find gaps in the theory and to improve its extensibility. Memoing takes place in the phase of selective coding; theoretical coding is done through sorting the memos. Glaser stresses that writing is an important step in integrating the theory. Writing the theory helps to reduce the amount of concepts and to further integrate the conceptual hypotheses. The empirical chapters in this study have been written and rewritten accordingly. As I come back to these research-mechanisms with more methodical detail in Chapter 5, brevity suffices here.

4.4 DEVELOPING PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

In practical-theology the concept-reality relationship is both pivotal as well as contested.⁶¹ Take for instance an act of worship. Worship is an attitude of a believing subject (or group of subjects) towards something that is worthy of honor. Religiously, however, worship only makes sense when God as greater being exists because the concept of worship includes that human beings acknowledge God's greatness. Or as Van den Brom puts it: 'We are concerned here with precisely those dispositions which the worshipper entertains towards the One who is Worshipped.' These dispositions are 'Godward' and include personal involvement, according to Van den Brom.⁶² The idea of worship thus entails the reality of the divine.

On the other hand, however, interpretative and perspectival approaches

61. For a realist articulation, see F. G. Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 247–266. On social constructionism in practical theology, see Hermans, C. et al., editors, *Social Constructionism and Theology*. Volume 7, Empirical Studies in Theology. (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002).

62. See L. van den Brom, *Divine Presence in the World*. (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1993), pp. 8–12. See also F. G. Immink, 'Theism and Christian Worship' in: G. v. d. Brink, L. J. v. d. Brom and M. Sarot, editors, *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology. Essays in Honour of Vincent Brümmer. Presented on the Occasion of the twenty-fifth Anniversary of his Professorship in the Philosophy of Religion in the University of Utrecht*. (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992); F. G. Immink, 'Human Discourse and the Act of Preaching' in: C. Hermans et al., editors, *Social Constructionism and Theology*. Volume 7, (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002).

question this idea-reality relationship.⁶³ In an interpretative framework, the idea of corporate worship can be seen as the attitude of a group of believers and a set of rituals to be performed. This approach, however, shares important features with idealism, aptly described by Barry Smith as the position that: ‘there is no such thing as objective reality, we cannot know what objective reality is like, and the term ‘reality’ signifies ‘nothing more than a construction built out of concepts, so that every concept-system would in principle have an equal claim to represent its own ‘reality’ or ‘possible world.’⁶⁴ The resulting theological expressivism treats concepts and theories as interpretations rather than as ontological renderings of the world. Blackburn rightly objects that this ‘cannot be true to the functions that religion centrally serves. There is no evading the fact that the person in the pew needs the ontological dimension. [...] The ontology alone gives the explanatory and justificatory thoughts that are integral to his or her understanding of what they are doing.’⁶⁵

So the ontological commitment of the people in the pew calls for an ontological commitment by the researcher.⁶⁶ Neglecting this commitment or putting it between the brackets of metaphysical agnosticism equals pushing the agenda of the researcher at the expense of the participant. The participant’s dispositions towards a religious reality extend beyond the pure mental or pure social. Psychological ideas imply—at least silently—an ontological commitment to the minds of those investigated; social ideas include ontological assumptions about the interaction between minds, the formation of groups and institutional facts constructed through human interaction.⁶⁷ Likewise, theological ideas that are manufactured about empirical data through decent methodical procedures entail a religious commitment. The commitment of the researcher does not merely coincide with it but does nonetheless justice to the participant’s practice. Or, in terms of Grounded Theory, it is supposed to fit the participant’s practice in order to be grounded.

Realism⁶⁸ thus entails foremost a commitment to the mind-independency

63. Cf. B. Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science. A Multicultural Approach*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 199–222.

64. B. Smith, ‘Beyond Concepts. Ontology as Reality Representation’ in: A. Varzi and L. Vieu, editors, *Formal Ontology in Information Systems. Proceedings of the Third International Conference (FOIS 2004)*. (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2004). Cf. also N. Wolterstorff, ‘Are Concept-Users World-Makers?’ in: J. E. Tomberlin, editor, *Philosophical Perspectives. Metaphysics*. Volume 1, (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1987).

65. S. Blackburn, ‘Religion and Ontology’ in: A. Moore and M. Scott, editors, *Realism and Religion. Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*. (Ashgate, 2007), p. 58.

66. Obviously, realism has many other rationales, yet the ‘participant perspective’ provides a strong indicator.

67. Cf. J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. (London: Penguin Books, 1995).

68. Realism comes in various flavours, such as metaphysical, external, naive and critical

of concepts. In other words, concepts tie the mind to the real world.⁶⁹ Or, as Immink puts it, 'what we express through our concepts refers to an autonomous existence, independent from the human self.'⁷⁰ This mind-independency of concepts can also be argued from the psychological and social realities themselves. As John Searle demonstrated, sociologists need an ontology that accounts for the existence of groups, the nature of human interaction and institutional facts such as money or government.⁷¹ The concept of government is not just a mental idea but is a complex of institutional, social, and even bare facts that to various levels exist independent of the thinking subject or the social interactions through which 'governing' takes place. Further, psychology also needs at least a basic ontological commitment of cognitive and emotional realities such as the self, the human mind and the psyche. Having ontological intuitions and commitments, however, does not imply that they can be empirically demonstrated. Here, the ontological aspect gives way to new epistemological reflections: empirical research is not able to prove these basic metaphysical assumptions. This puts the existence of groups, minds, and even God on an equal epistemological level.⁷²

Let us pursue the matter one step further and more specifically focus on the nature of empirical theological ideas. In section 1.5 I adopted Van der Ven's view that intradisciplinarity entails that theology itself becomes empirical. Intradisciplinarity in itself, however, does not solve the ontological question to what (part of) reality practical-theological concepts refer to. Do they refer to meaning-entities such as thoughts, propositions, concepts or perspectives or do they refer to object entities such as properties, relations, events, states-of-affairs or processes?⁷³ If we opt for the latter and I suggest we do in the light of the ontological considerations above, do practical-theological concepts refer to communicative processes and psycho-social attitudes? Again, if so, how do these interhuman phenomena indicate religious experiences and processes?

realism. All versions, however, entail the idea that reality is not just mind-dependent but has mind-independent qualities. Since I cannot go into details here, I confine myself to a rather simplified version of 'realism' without any further adjectives. Similarly, see C. Robson, *Real World Research. A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. 2nd edition. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 29–30.

69. On the real world-interest, see above, section 1.1.

70. Immink, *Faith*, p. 256.

71. Cf. J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: philosophy in the real world*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998); Searle, *Construction*. Barry Smith calls for an even stronger ontology of social realities, see B. Smith, 'John Searle. From Speech Acts to Social Reality'. in: *John Searle* (Cambridge U.P., 2003).

72. Cf. Alvin Plantinga's argument in which he demonstrates that the belief in human minds and the belief in God are epistemologically similar beliefs. See A. Plantinga, *God and Other Minds. A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*. (Cornell University Press, 1990).

73. See for the distinction between meaning-entities and object-entities, B. Smith, 'An Essay in Formal Ontology'. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 6 (1978).

Take again the practical-theological concept of ‘praising God in corporate worship’. What reality does this concept represent? It is clear that corporate worship consists of many interhuman communicative acts. The social action of ‘singing together’ is among them. Social facts, to borrow a definition from John Searle, are collective intentional facts.⁷⁴ Singing together is a collective action and, in order to qualify sounds produced by more than one individual as ‘singing together’, a shared intention is needed.⁷⁵ Yet with the mere social fact of ‘people singing together within a particular frame of time and at a particular venue, viz. a service of worship’ the reality to which the concept of ‘praising God’ refers to has not been adequately captured. At least, not from the perspective of the worshipping believer. According to him or her ‘without the referent of the term “God” there would be no proper worship.’⁷⁶

According to a classic definition, religious facts are ‘things that deal with God himself or are related to him.’⁷⁷ The religious fact of worshipping God exemplifies a ‘thing as it relates to God’. Religiously it refers to a set of real-life actions and dispositions directed to God in order to give Him honour and praise. These actions and dispositions have all sorts of psychological and social properties. Psychologically, the act of worship comes with cognitions and emotions. Socially, ‘singing together’ refers to something that people do together. Hence, the practical-theological concept of corporate worship as ‘praising God together in singing’ has a dual intentionality.⁷⁸ So worshipping God is a social-psychological ‘thing’ in its relation to God. The notion points to social (singing together) and religious (praising God) activities or practices simultaneously. Though religious and social facts concern different “domains” in reality they are nonetheless connected factually. This actual community of believers produces sounds that do

74. Searle, *Construction*, pp. 120–125.

75. See also R. Tuomela, *The Importance of Us. A Philosophical Study of Basic Social Notions*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

76. Immink, ‘Theism and Christian Worship’, p. 135.

77. F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology. Volume 1: First to Tenth Topic. Transl. from the Latin by George Musgrave Giger. Edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. Original title: Institutio theologiae elencticae. Published in Geneva, 1688.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), p. 16. This is a ‘hard’ version of the *objectum theologiae*, namely that theological statements are about God. Nowadays various ‘softer’ versions argue that the object of theology consists of ‘human speech about God’. Cf. Adriaanse, H. J., Krop, H. A. and Leertouwer, L., editors, *Het verschijnsel theologie. Over de wetenschappelijke status van de theologie.* (Meppel / Amsterdam: Boom, 1987), pp. 63–66. Here, theology basically is a form of anthropology. See also McGrath’s comments on Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic theological approach, A. E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine. A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 26–34.

78. To be precise, singing is only one instant of worship. Worship is much broader than just singing. In the context of a regular church service, hearing, praying and giving are also acts of worship. See H. O. Old, *Worship. Reformed according to Scripture.* Revised and expanded edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); M. J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time. The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

not just *count as*⁷⁹ ‘singing’ and ‘worshipping’ due to a social convention but from the participants point of view their singing *is* an act of worship. The God they believe in is worthy of praise and in singing human beings do in fact offer God the praise he deserves.

Relating the social fact of singing to the religious fact of praise highlights the dual nature of practical-theological concepts. First, religious phenomena are not identical with social phenomena. They may factually come together in one singing person or worshipping community but the religious act of worship cannot be reduced to the social act of singing. Worship refers to another reality than singing does. Contemporary sociologists of religion like Rodney Stark and Martin Riesebrodt are very much aware of this. Stark rejects the modern collapse of the religious into the social and acknowledges the specifics of religious practices as ‘grounded in religious assumptions’.⁸⁰ Against the older Durkheimian view that the fundamental object of religion lies in its social functions he contends that religions are concerned with the supernatural and the ‘phenomenology of faith and worship’. The core interest of religion lies in ‘supernatural exchange relations’.⁸¹

Further, some religious facts are not related to social-psychological phenomena at all. Take for instance the Christian articulation of God’s Trinitarian essence or the claim that God assumed human nature in Jesus Christ. Similarly, some social facts are not inherently religious, e.g. institutions as banks or schools.⁸² In worship, however, the social and the religious come together; worship thus consists of combining the elements of religious praise and social singing.⁸³ The practical-theological idea of ‘worship’ singles out this connection of the religious and the social on a conceptual level, indicating both singing together and praising God. So theological ideas generated from empirical data are characterised by a dual intentionality. They intend social and religious phenomena in one single

79. See for the notion ‘count as’, Searle, *Construction*, pp. 43–51, N. Wolterstorff, *Divine discourse. Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), pp. 75–94. Also Smith, ‘From Speech Acts to Social Reality’, pp. 15–18.

80. R. Stark, *For the Glory of God. How Monotheism led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*. (Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 7–8. Cf. also M. Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen*. (München: C.H. Beck, 2007), pp. 108–135.

81. R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith. Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 89–90. See also R. Stark, *One True God. Historical Consequences of Monotheism*. (Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 4–6, 12–17.

82. It is not to say that they could not be religiously relevant, but they do not entail religious facts per se.

83. Singing is only one particular way of worship. By the way, worship extends beyond the regular church service and also includes service of God in everyday life and living a life of thankfulness.

theoretical element.

This dual nature of practical-theological concepts is vital for understanding the process of manufacturing homiletical ideas, ideas on preaching and about what happens in the preaching event. Current homiletical literature incorporates all kinds of theoretical notions: rhetorical, communicational, theatrical, dialectic theological, and postmodern ethical, only to mention a few. These ideas are usually taken from various discourses, depending on the scholar's interest or the philosophical framework adopted. Usually these concepts are applied to homiletics as additional idiom. Preaching strategies are explained in rhetorical or theatrical terms⁸⁴ or homiletical theories are normatively approached in terms of postmodern ethics.⁸⁵ In this study I use Grounded Theory to methodically generate a conceptual idiom that fits the empirical field and is able to connect the religious aspect to these theoretical strands. The dual intentionality of practical-theological concepts helps to find notions that are able to capture social-psychological and communicative processes, dimensions, and conditions while staying open for the religious to emerge. Grounding homiletical theory in empirical data, therefore, entails the construction of theory with concepts that have a double intentionality. They refer to the social acts in preaching and hearing and indicate the religious realities embedded in these acts and practices. This is the methodical implication of the notions 'homiletic interaction' (Chapter 2) and 'divine-human dynamics' (Chapter 3).

According to Barney Glaser, 'for GT, a concept is the naming of an emergent social pattern grounded in research data.'⁸⁶ I conclude that for GT a concept may also be the naming of an emergent socio-religious pattern grounded in research data.

84. L. L. Hogan and R. Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation. Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); J. Childers, *Performing the Word. Preaching as Theatre*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

85. J. S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. (Chalice Press, 2001); I. Reuter, *Predigt Verstehen. Grundlagen einer homiletischen Hermeneutik*. Volume 17, *Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie*. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

86. B. G. Glaser, 'Conceptualization. On Theory and Theorizing Using Grounded Theory'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1 Retrieved August 2008 (2002):2 (URL: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm>).

5

FROM DATA TO THEORY

5.1 INTERVIEWING TOWARDS ABSTRACTION

In the previous chapter I presented the three core aspects of theory-formation in practical-theology according to Grounded Theory: ideas are systematically manufactured, they are grounded in empirical data, and the ideas manufactured in this study are homiletical-theological. Theory-formation takes place in three cycles of conceptualisation: open, selected and theoretical coding. Each coding cycle consists of reoccurring procedures: sampling, comparing, coding, and memoing. These procedures account for a move from concrete data towards an abstract and conceptual rendering of what is going on in the data.

In this chapter I present the course of research from initial sampling towards writing the tentative, modifiable empirical-theological theory of listening. In three sections I describe how the interviews were designed according to the needs of each cycle, from open to semi-structured; which codes were generated by applying the coding procedures; and where methodical deviations took place. Open coding offers the first attempt of finding central categories (section 5.2). Further, selective coding shows how codes were saturated by sampling more data and how properties of categories were generated (section 5.3). Finally, theoretical coding (section 5.4) demonstrates how the various substantive codes become integrated by means of theoretical codes and it presents the analytic framework of the theory, which is further developed in the next part of this study.

The data for this study are generated between 2003 and 2006 in four different congregations of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Four samples of data are generated in six steps: (1) in the cycle of open coding I collected material from five respondents in two congregations (initial sample). (2) Next, I did a second interview with these five listeners to start the cycle of selected coding, (3) I also included four new respondents from both congregations (2nd sample). Again, (4) I interviewed these new respondents for a second time. (5) Based on the

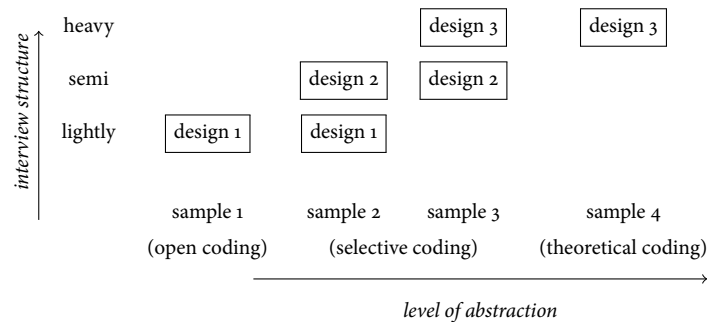


Figure 5.1 Interview designs during the process of research

concepts generated, I did a small survey to sample new respondents. The cycle of selected coding closed with two new respondents from a new congregation based upon the results of this survey (3rd sample). (6) Finally, I started the cycle of theoretical coding by sampling four new respondents from a fourth congregation (4th sample).¹ For each coding cycle, I changed the interview design.² Figure 5.1 shows the relationship between the level of structure in the interview design and the level of abstraction in data analysis.

	design 1	design 2	design 3
structure	light	semi	heavy
conceptual goal	exploring	saturating	integrating
focus	what is good sermon?	was it a good sermon?	concepts: 'entering the sermon' and 'redefining faith'

Table 5.1 Topics in the interview-designs

From open coding to theoretical coding I moved from lightly structured interviewing to heavy structured interviewing. The lightly-structured and semi-structured designs have so-called starting questions like, what makes a good sermon? (design 1) and what would you have missed when you hadn't heard the sermon last Sunday? (design 2). Starting-questions intend to generate an

1. See table 4.1 on page 89 for a complete overview of the four samples.

2. For structuring interviews for generating qualitative data, see T. Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing. Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. (London: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 60–70. Also K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 25–27.

open narrative flow by the respondent rather than categorising the responses too prematurely. The third design is more theoretically informed by the emerging framework. Table 5.1 lists some characteristics of the interview designs; the full designs are included in appendix A.

5.2 OPEN CODING: FROM LABEL TO CONCEPTUAL CODE

The first step in theory-formation moves from generating data and labelling pieces of data with descriptive terms towards constructing core categories that capture the conceptual patterns in the data.

Data is generated through interviews, recorded and transcribed, and analysed with the help of the software application Atlas.ti.³ Though Atlas.ti presents itself as an application for ‘theory-building’, in my own experience the most commonly used features are the ‘code-and-retrieve’ functions. These functions help the researcher to label fragments of data—‘quotations’ in Atlas.ti jargon, to store the labelled fragments in a database in order to retrieve the fragments that have similar labels, to compare them and to formulate new labels.⁴ These labels are called ‘codes’. Atlas.ti helps to easily name and rename labels and helps research to stay focussed on types of codes that are needed. Further, the memo-function of Atlas.ti is very flexible and useful for storing large amounts of all kinds of memos that contain theoretical, bibliographical and methodical reflections.

In Grounded Theory labels refer to conceptual elements in a theoretical framework. The task in coding is to move from a label as a linguistic designator—sometimes erroneously rendered as description, towards a concept as a representation of reality.⁵ So descriptive labels like, ‘it’s about me’ and ‘care for creation’ are treated as indicators for larger conceptual categories such as ‘connecting with the sermon’ and ‘the listener’s orientation towards salvation’ as processes and

3. www.atlasti.com. The application is only available for the Windows-platform. The most recent version (summer 2009) is 5.6. Alternatively, the open-source and multiplatform application WEFT provides code-and-retrieve functions, see <http://www.pressure.to/qda/>. For transcription I used free software Expressed Scribe, see <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>.

4. On the use of computer software in qualitative research and the various functionalities, see U. Kelle, ‘Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis’, in: C. Seale et al., editors, *Qualitative Research Practice*. (London: Sage, 2004). For a comparison of various programmes, see A. Lewins and C. Silver, *Using Software in Qualitative Research: A Step-by-Step Guide*. (Sage Publications Ltd, 2007). Kelle is very sceptical about the theory-building abilities of computer software, see U. Kelle, ‘Theory Building in Qualitative Research and Computer Programs for the Management of Textual Data’, *Sociological Research Online*, 2004 (1997):12 March (URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/2/1.html>).

5. For concepts as representations, see J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 160–167.

name	gender	age group	educational level	marital status	congregation type
Caroline	f	young	high	married	orthodox
Marc	m	elderly	middle	married	orthodox
Judith	f	elderly	low	married	orthodox
Ronald	m	elderly	high	married	mainstream
Deborah	f	middle	middle	married	mainstream

Table 5.2 Background facts of the respondents in the cycle of open coding

intentional states respectively.⁶ In the phase of open coding conceptual codes are generated as much as possible from the first five interviews. These codes are ‘open’ in the sense that they are not derived from a previously formulated conceptual or theoretical framework. Yet this does not entail an inductivist position, since the data are generated within the bounds of a clearly defined area as described in part I of this study.

In the following subsections I introduce the first five respondents (5.2.1), then I present an analysis of these interviews along the three analytic questions that Glaser offers to guide open coding analysis (5.2.2), resulting in a tentative framework that moves into the next phase of selective coding (5.2.5).

5.2.1 Respondents

An initial sample of five respondents is collected, coded, and categorised. Table 5.2 shows the distribution of the data according to some generally accepted variables.⁷ These respondents were selected by the local preacher. I asked the local ministers of both congregations for names of possible respondents.⁸ Obviously, this could import bias in the data for the respondents are more likely to be positive about the preacher. On the one hand, this bias is straightened out in a next cycle of sampling. In case a ‘positive attitude towards the preacher’ is very relevant for the religious practice of listening, it will emerge when interviewing new respondents. If not, the bias of this first sample is not as problematic as it seems.⁹ On the other hand, however, this very probable bias also provides

6. About codes as indicators and data as incidents, see 4.2.

7. These variables should not be taken as indicators for representivity, nor do they suggest that they are theoretically and explanatory relevant. Rather arbitrary, they make explicit some variety among the respondents in this study.

8. They were given a small list of criteria such as equal gender divisions, at least one person younger than 30 years and one older than 65.

9. According to Glaser, ‘conceptualisation by constant comparison will show the underlying bias as it emerges—for bias is just another variable. [...] Theoretical sampling directs selection

an opportunity. If a negative attitude towards the preacher would hinder the process of listening¹⁰, a first sample of respondents with an (assumed) positive attitude provides a better window to study best practices of listening for it lacks an impeding factor. I contacted the respondents by letter and invited them for an interview a week later by phone.¹¹

The first interviews, based on design 1 (see appendix A) with five respondents took place in spring 2003. The main topic in the interview was the reconstruction of what—according to the listener—qualities make a sermon into a good sermon. This question challenges the hearer to express his *expectations* of sermon-listening in order to find out what is at stake for the listener in hearing a sermon. The two or three features mentioned by the respondent became the portal for a more in-depth conversation about sermon-listening. Since the respondents are regular churchgoers their expectations reveal their actual practice of listening without immediately addressing the evaluation of the most recently heard sermon.¹² The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed accordingly.¹³ The resulting files were assigned in Atlas.ti for coding.

Before providing the details of coding the incidents, I briefly introduce the five listeners.¹⁴

for a theoretical purpose. If bias creeps in, then it will surface as another category by constant comparison and saturation.' Cf. B. G. Glaser, *Conceptualization contrasted with Description. The Grounded Theory Perspective, volume 1.* (Sociology Press, 2001), p. 150.

10. A negative attitude towards the preacher in listening would be part of the ethos-dimension. According to previous research 'relationship enhances listening', cf. R. J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon.* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), pp. 26–31. Also C. Bunnars, 'Die Hörer'. in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt.* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlag, 1990), pp. 166–167. On the other hand, the preacher-audience relationship only weakly contributes to the meaning of the sermon according to H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State.* (Berlin: LIT, 2008), p. 273.

11. The two ministers provided me with 12 names of which 9 eventually became part of the first two samples.

12. This became the topic of interview design 2.

13. Transcription took place with help of Express Scribe, a freeware Windows application. See <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>. For transcription rules, see I. Parker, *Discourse Dynamics. Critical analysis for social and individual psychology.* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 124–125.

14. These introductions contain four aspects: a characteristic of the respondent's religious biography, her or his attachment to the church as religious institution, and one or two features of the listening profile of the respondent, and in some cases a brief methodical note about the interview. Since this study does not share the ethnographic interest in 'thick descriptions' of individual listeners, these introductions are brief. The respondents though deserve a little more attention than just being reduced to theoretically relevant 'sermon listening incidents'.

Caroline

A 25-year-old woman, married, having a part-time job and being a mother of one child. She has been very active in youth work in her congregation. She belongs to a traditional and orthodox congregation and has a strong sense of the confessional identity of the church. Her loyalty to the congregation, however, does not block her from talking about some serious issues that bother her in church.

Being especially interested in communicative issues—throughout the interview she comes with all kinds of advices for preachers to improve their communicative abilities—when it comes to the importance of preaching, however, she mentions notions like understanding the Scriptures, enjoying the gospel of Jesus Christ, and being part of the congregation.

Marc and Judith

I made an appointment with a retired man in his seventies but when I started the interview his wife kindly asked permission to stay around. Eventually, she contributed to the interview as much as her husband did. Both are very loyal churchgoers with outspoken views on their favourite preachers.

During the interview it was hard to keep the respondents on track and the subject-matter of sermon-listening was hard to reflect on for them. Labelling the interview was not very rewarding since the conversation had generated only a few specific and personalised sermon-listening incidents.

Ronald

A retired general practitioner. His religious story is quite unusual. He was brought up among professing Christian Scientists. 'You must have knowledge, belief is not enough', so he summarizes the religious attitude of his parents. It fitted rather well with his medical training. Together with his newly wedded wife he left for America. They attended an evangelical church, 'happy Christianity' he calls it. Back in the Netherlands after a crisis in his marriage, he joined a house church with a couple of liberal theologians for biblestudy, which soon became too detailed and intellectual in his perception. Now he belongs to a mainstream congregation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

Ronald has clear convictions about the length of a service and the diction of the preacher. Yet hearing a sermon is foremost experiencing an interesting exposition of Scripture and measuring the inner self against the example of Christ. A sermon is supposed to touch upon actual issues; preachers should not become too political though.

Deborah

A forty-year-old woman who is on the verge of losing her job. Married, a son at the age of six. Being raised in a Christian family, she never really lost touch with the church though she visited a youth church for a while when she was a teenager. She is not very much involved in all kinds of activities in church but she and her husband are regular attenders. From time to time she joins her mother to visit another church, just for a change. Intrigued by the Schuller's preaching, she watches *The Hour of Power* quite often, 'very American as it is' though.

A sermon must help you to make sense of your life, to sort out the issues that touches everyone in society. In hearing a sermon God is trying to say something to you. She clearly remembers a service in the time of severe cattle diseases. 'Why isn't there more preaching and praying for animals rights', she exclaims.

5.2.2 Analytic questions and labelling conceptual elements

Basically, coding is labelling pieces of interviews to capture analytic ideas.¹⁵ Labels are answers to analytic questions that run the data open. Questioning the data, however, is not a neutral enterprise since it always involves pre-theoretical ideas. Yet to stay as open as possible, the analytic question must have a large degree of openness in order to prevent the researcher from running into pre-conception too early. Barney Glaser offers three analytic questions to guide the coding process. Glaser's questions aim to generate sociological theory.¹⁶ Since my goal is to generate theological-homiletical ideas, I reformulate them as follows:

1. What is relevant in the data for a homiletical study? (section 5.2.3)
2. What (property of a) socio-religious category is indicated in the data? (section 5.2.4)
3. What is religiously going on in the data? (section 5.2.5)

For the sake of manufacturing homiletical-theological ideas I have made the religious interest explicit. Further, the reformulation is based upon, at least, three of my own pre-theoretical assumptions: (1) religious realities can be studied empirically¹⁷; and hearing consists of (2) homiletic interaction and (3) a divine-

15. For an example, see table 4.4 on page 98.

16. The original rendering of the questions is as follows: (1) What is this data a study of? (2) What category or property of a category is indicated in the data? and (3) What is going on in the data? The social is assumed so there is no need for Glaser to render the questions like 'What is this data a sociological study of' etc. See for their original formulations B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity. Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. (Sociology Press, 1978), p. 57. Also Charmaz, *Constructing*, p. 47.

17. See section 1.1; also 4.4.

human dynamics.¹⁸ Nonetheless, these questions are as open as possible, they aim to keep the researcher open to all kinds of homiletic or religious processes, conditions etc. that are latent in the data, and they continually remind the researcher of conceptualisation rather than of running into description.¹⁹

Open coding is carried out by applying these analytic questions to the data. Incident-by-incident the three questions are asked and answered by writing a code in the margin of the interview-transcript. The first five interviews thus generated 280+ codes or conceptual ideas about all sorts of fragments.²⁰ These codes were stored in Atlas.ti and commented upon. Ideas about possible relationships between codes (categories or properties) were recorded in theoretical memos. When initial categories, hypothetical relationships between categories, and ideas concerning properties of categories are formulated, open coding is followed by selective coding.

5.2.3 What is relevant in the data for a homiletical study?

Inductive procedures run the risk that analysis wanders away from the intended research question. Especially in the case in which a broad research question with under-developed operationalised concepts, the need to keep methodical control over the direction of analysis is pressing. Continually asking the first analytic question helped to establish whether an interview-fragment was still within the demarcated homiletical field of homiletic interaction and divine-human-dynamics. If not, the fragment was skipped, if questionable, the fragment was nonetheless coded.²¹

An interesting example is the interview with Marc and Judith. During the interview I had a hard time focussing the respondents on the subject matter of sermon listening. Despite their lovely characters, they were quite difficult to be managed to act as respondents in a setting of a rather formal conversation. They did not seem to contribute much in terms of relevant data. In fact, when they talked about a 'great sermon' they were barely able to articulate what listening made such a great experience for them. Though I was tempted to disqualify large portions of the data irrelevant, the data proved itself to be relevant for a homiletical study and thus worth being coded.

18. See Chapter 2 and 3.

19. Analytic questions break the data into meaningful units and ascribe meaning to them. For the problem of preconception in analytic questioning see B. G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis. Emergence vs Forcing*. (Sociology Press, 1992). For the difference between description and conceptualisation, see Glaser, *Conceptualisation contrasted with Description*.

20. For a complete list, see appendix B.

21. On the other hand, since GT does not concern itself with accurate descriptions the risk of loosing bits of data were not too high. Indicators of relevant concepts need to occur and re-occur, a one-instance incident is not very reliable to build theory from.

It appeared, however, after conducting and coding the second interview (see the cycle of selective coding) that reoccurring reactions like ‘it was a beautiful sermon, I can’t tell you why’ indicated a property of the listening experience. The data were full of indicators of what became the liturgical-immediate dimension of the listening experience²², listening itself is worthwhile rather than being something to be reflected upon. First I overlooked this category, perhaps because of the dominance of content-related issues and life-connections in the literature. It was only until the phase of selective coding that I realised that these respondents were talking about hearing a sermon in its experiential quality rather than giving reflective remarks on what makes a sermon a good sermon. Staying open for the emergence of new ideas proved succesful in this case. The fact that meaning is in hearing itself provides a new (ritual) perspective rather than that meaning is created or received in listening, as articulated in constructivist theories or effect-research.

Further, answering the first analytic question enabled me to reflect more closely on the nature of the data. What characterizes the data as data? So I came up with the idea of ‘sermon listening incidents’ as presented more detailed in section 4.2.2. The incidents are quantitatively and qualitatively very different. Some are about very specific sermons, recently heard or part of the listener’s ‘hearing history’.²³ Ronald tells, for instance, about the sermon held at his weddingday. He never heard it again but it still challenges him because it has made him aware that he has not been able to live up against what was preached that day. Other incidents express expectations or concern a general attitude towards the phenomenon of preaching. The interviews consist of series of sermon-listening-incidents that mainly vary according four core properties: degree of specificity, level of personalisation, religious reference, and temporal index.

So the first analytic question kept me thinking about the nature, the usefulness, and the conceptual limitations of the material. It does not take interviews for granted, it strengthens theoretical sensitivity in relation to the answers provided by the respondent, and helps the researcher to capture ideas that might have been disqualified otherwise.

22. See in more detail section 7.2.

23. For the notion ‘hearing history’ see also section 6.4.

5.2.4 What (property of a) socio-religious category is indicated in the data?

During coding I moved away from descriptions to conceptualisations.²⁴ In my experience coding too soon runs into descriptives and I had to reorganize my codes for purposes of conceptualisation, i.e. creating theoretical bits with enduring grab, and naming patterns in a way that is abstract of time, place and people.²⁵ In order to avoid starting over with coding, I reorganized the codes. Then I clustered them as parsimoniously as possible. Finally, I began to conceptualise only those incidents that were put in the cluster of codes with the most integrating power.

The first step consisted of listing all labels—conceptual terms, descriptives, theoretical notions and in-vivo codes together—into a large list of 280+ codes. In reflecting on these codes, comparing them together and clustering them I bundled the codes in clusters each referring to one ‘element’ in the whole process of listening with the intent to look for integrating ideas that glued these ‘elements’ together. I found three clusters of codes: codes on listener-related issues, on sermon-related aspects and on salvation-related aspects.²⁶ The second step consisted of finding the integrating (fourth) cluster and conceptualising the cluster in terms of categories and properties of categories. Table 5.3 on page 123 gives an impression of the four clusters and their codes.

Step 1: Clustering the codes

The initial 280+ codes²⁷ were a mixture of concrete in-vivo codes (e.g. ‘it’s about me’), abstract theoretical codes (e.g. intentionality, competence), descriptive terms (e.g. marital background, personal situation), and conceptual ideas (e.g. growing towards Christ, feeling resistance). For purposes of conceptualisation, many codes were too theoretical for open coding—they have the tendency to force the research too soon into a particular framework, and many were too descriptive—they move the research into the direction of ethnographic ‘thick

24. About the difference between description motivated research and coding for conceptualisation, see Glaser, *Conceptualisation contrasted with Description*; also J. A. Holton, ‘The Coding Process and Its Challenges’ in: K. Charmaz and A. Bryant, editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007). – chapter 13, pp. 272–274. See for the descriptive versus conceptual rendering of data also section 4.3.2.

25. See Glaser, *Conceptualisation contrasted with Description*, pp. 10–21.

26. The methodical procedure of this second step followed this pattern: a code was put in a formulated cluster, if not fitting either a new cluster was formulated or an existing cluster was reformulated. All 280+ codes were thus clustered into three sub-clusters and one integrating idea.

27. See for a list, appendix B.

descriptions'²⁸ of individual listeners. I could have dismissed the non-conceptual codes or recoded them. The latter seemed to cumbersome, the former to radical. The risk of loosing important incidents would be too high. So I clustered the codes as parsimoniously as possible. It appeared that respondents indicate the following four aspects of listening in the interviews:

1. the individual and corporate context of listening;
2. the actual sermon as part of the worship-service;
3. the listener's orientation towards salvation;
4. the connection that emerges in listening between listener, sermon, and orientation towards salvation.

All 285 codes fit one of these four general descriptive clusters. Table 5.3 on page 123 illustrates the distribution of codes among the clusters.²⁹ These clusters contain all kinds of utterances in the interviews and are thus to be considered as discursive clusters. In the first cluster of codes we find utterances concerning the listener, his background, how he relates to the Christian faith, his mood, previous listening-experiences, the relationship to the congregation, and what everyday-life is like. This cluster of incidents in the data concerns the *listener-related* discourse in the interviews, notably those fragments in which the listener addresses himself. The second cluster includes typically *sermon-related* interview discourse. It contains utterances by the hearer concerning the sermon, the performance of the preacher, the liturgy, the personality of the preacher. These utterances entail foremost objective statements and informative assertives such as 'the church was packed', 'the language of the sermon was too abstract', 'the preacher is very well-known'. Sometimes, however, they express value judgments like 'I wasn't able to follow the train of thoughts in the sermon' or 'I find the minister a very competent speaker'. Those statements concern the characteristics of the sermon in the context of the worship-service from the perspective of the listener.

The third cluster is slightly different. During the interviews many hearers talk about what they believe in, they express ideas, feelings, experiences that indicate *salvation* in Christian faith. Respondents express trust in God, doubt, hope, longing etc. They feel accepted by God, they long for a growing likeness to Christ, or have strong eschatological expectations. At first sight the parts of the interview that address this reality of salvation seem to drag the interview into other areas than sermon-listening. Yet they are relevant for two reasons. First, they inform us about how the listener experiences Christian faith. Secondly, talking about the sermon brings associations with it that makes the listener talks

28. C. Robson, *Real World Research. A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. 2nd edition. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 186.

29. The total amount of codes is totalised in the final row.

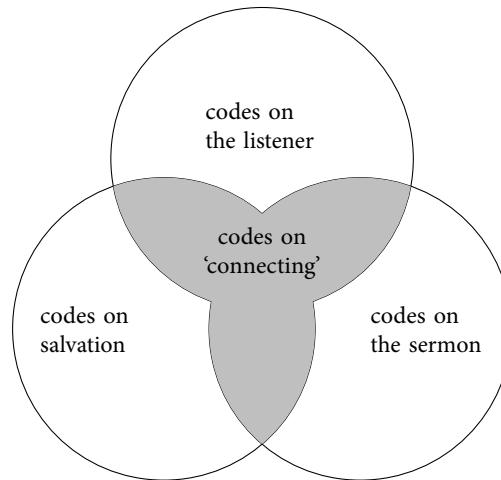


Figure 5.2 Diagram of the four discursive clusters

more generally about what he believes about salvation and faith.

Besides discourse on the listener, the sermon or salvation, the interviews have material that cannot be put in either of these three clusters. It turns out that this material concerns two clusters or even all three clusters. I put this material in a fourth category that is named 'connecting the listener, the sermon and salvation'. Figure 5.2 graphically presents this fourth cluster as the overlap of the three other clusters. This fourth cluster is the most promising one for theoretical purposes: during the interviews hearers continually address the (supposed) relationship between their own lives of faith, the world of the sermon and aspects of salvation. So the fourth cluster consists of patterns of integration between the three other clusters. The codes in this cluster indicate how the connection between sermon, listener and salvation is shaped. The notion *connection* is still very provisional and should be tried against new data, be reformulated and even be dropped for a better label since 'finding the best fit name can take time'.³⁰ The idea of 'connection' is a favourite notion in many publications on preaching and listening.³¹ Connection has religious qualities as appears in the following codes: 'the sermon made me think about Christ', 'the sermon helped me to see beyond here-and-now existence', 'the minister addressed my needs', 'I felt close to God during the sermon'.

30. B. G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory. Issues and Discussions*. (Sociology Press, 1998), pp. 143–144.

31. Cf. L. L. Hogan and R. Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation. Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); Day, D., Astley, J. and Francis, L. J., editors, *A Reader on Preaching. Making Connections*. (Ashgate, 2005).

cluster 1: listener-related	cluster 2: world of the sermon	cluster 3: reality of salvation	cluster 4: connecting clusters 1—3
background (family)	preacher's character	faith is real	sacred moment
background (marriage)	preacher is vulnerable	topic: eternal life	sermon creates expectation
personal situation	evocative language	t: growing towards Christ	it's about me
faith (basic trust)	unity of liturgy	t: forgiveness	sermon hard to follow
faith (doubt)	sermon-bible relationship	t: the life of faith	affirmed in what I believe
here-and-now life	sermon content: depth	t: ordering chaos	listener feels resistance
membership church	sermon structure: simple	t: care for creation	this is important!
.....
58 codes	75 codes	25 codes	127 codes

Table 5.3 Four analytic-clusters as the result of open coding

Step 2: Conceptualising the integrating cluster of 'connecting'

The fourth cluster of codes connects aspects of the listener, the world of the sermon and the reality of salvation. Methodically, I decided to focus on those data that were contained in this cluster. Analytically, the question then becomes: 'what properties does *connecting* have in the practice of hearing a sermon?' The second step in moving from the description of the data towards a more theoretical rendering of the data consists of formulating concepts and properties within the area that is singled out by the fourth, integrating cluster of codes. Therefore, I focussed the analysis on those interview fragments contained by the connecting-cluster.³² Below I present the brief memos that were written on these 8 properties during the first cycle of coding.³³ Four exemplary memos are accompanied by a brief list of codes and a few incidents from the interviews.

32. I counted 221 quotations in Atlas.ti on connecting.

33. The aspects of cultivation, concentration and revelatory moments have been introduced in previous publications, see F. G. Immink and T. T. J. Pleizier, 'Research in Homiletics' in: A. Grözinger and K. Ho Soon, editors, *Preaching as Shaping Experience in a World of Conflict*. Volume 5, (Singapore, 2005); F. G. Immink and T. T. J. Pleizier, 'Theological Concepts in Empirical Homiletics' in: *Annual Meeting Academy of Homiletics*. Volume 40, (Williamsburg, VA, 2005).

Shaping the intentionality of faith

Listening directs the mind of the listener to religion. The sermon makes the hearer think about God, the Scriptures, the tradition of Christianity, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and how to live a Christian life. This aspect of listening is so obvious, that it is either neglected in many studies on sermon reception or assumed without further analysis. Faith is a living and dynamic aspect of believers that connects them with God. Hearing shapes the intentionality of faith, leaving aside how sermon-related aspects (content, performance) account for this 'shaping' or how listener-related aspects (such as biography, personality etc.) relate to this.³⁴

example codes: the 'aboutness of the sermon' as reported by the listener, such as: the sermon is about...

- the life of Jesus,
- order versus chaos,
- future expectation,
- human condition,
- growing in faith,
- the sermon expresses what I believe in

example incidents: 'Once it were Easter; and the preacher put it into a future perspective and that touched me, it made me think: yes that's why I am here in church.' (Caroline);

'That's why Jesus comes, to give us an example. Otherwise we would never believe it and never keep our faith. Then he (the preacher) starts talking about different aspects of the Spirit.' (Ronald)

Intrapersonal conversation

In hearing the listener engages in an inner conversation. From the perspective of listeners, three voices contribute to this conversation: the hearer's own thoughts, the ideas of the preacher, and something that is attributed to God ('Through the preacher God is trying to say something to you'). The themes of this conversation are either taken from the sermon ('you have something to think about') or from themes that are urgent or important in the listener's life. This may be an important source of 'distraction' in listening for it interrupts following the natural course of the sermon: the listener starts thinking about something the preacher says while the sermon goes on, the inner conversation is rather autonomous from the perspective of the listener. It seems that such an autonomous conversation parallels a lower degree of concentration on the sermon. Yet when the intrapersonal conversation remains closely connected to the course of the sermon: the listener thinks along the sermon ('the sermon is a gift to ponder'). Here concentration is more intense. In this respect, Manfred Josuttis mentions the 'third ear', 'in an extreme receptive hearing-situation such

34. See for the notion of intentionality as mind-directedness, J. R. Searle, *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

as listening to a sermon, a multiple dialog occurs, between the Self and the other, between new opportunities and older conflicts.³⁵

Cultivating faith

Part of the performative power of the sermon is how it helps the believer's faith to grow and flourish. Hearing sustains faith, does the understanding of the Scriptures grow and nourishes the knowledge of Christ. At this point, it seems that cultivation takes two routes, a ritual route (the listener enjoys the sermon: 'It makes me happy when I hear about Jesus') and a reflective route (because of the sermon the listener thinks: 'I compare myself to the life Christ lived'). Cultivation is about what already exists, the life of faith. In listening, hearers relate the sermon to their own life of faith, which means that their faith in Christ is invoked, critically examined in the light of the sermon or enjoyed during listening to the sermon.

example codes:

- sermon gives energy,
- keeping the faith,
- renewal of faith,
- enjoying the sermon,
- sermon helps to understand the bible,
- the sermon sustains faith in Christ

example incidents: 'In the sermon I want to compare myself to the life Christ lived and why eventually he died. It was a very unjust and cruel act yet it gives me a model that in this material existence we can only reach that life asymptotically. True eternal life is only available if you really live like Christ did.' (Ronald);

'In listening, when you are aware of it or not, it's that you keep thinking about God, that you connect to Him more, that you are aware that He is around you.' (Deborah)

Hearing in community

In regular worship-setting listeners are not on their own and they are aware of the fact that during listening they are part of a larger community of faith. On a cognitive and social level this entails the awareness of plurality: different personalities, ages, social positions, and spiritualities come together for worship. Yet two emerging aspects are especially relevant here. First, hearers think about other members of the congregation to whom this part of the sermon may be helpful or challenging (code: *listening for each other*). So listeners are part of a collective audience. Second, hearing the sermon is a means for building the community of faith. Preaching is expressive in the sense that it sustains the confessional identity of the community ('We need to hear that').

35. M. Josuttis, *Der Weg in das Leben. Eine Einführung in den Gottesdienst auf verhaltenswissenschaftlicher Grundlage*. (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1993), p. 213.

Instrumentalising the sermon

Listening equips the hearer with new ideas, inspires listeners to act Christianly and to test their lives along the standards of the Scriptures and it helps them to figure out theological issues. Instrumentalisation points to an effect of the sermon *after* the service. The notion of instrumentalisation tries to capture the expectation that sermons must be useful or practical and it extends the ‘effect’ of the sermon—from the perspective of the listener—into everyday life.

example codes:

- using the sermon,
- the sermon inspires to act in new ways,
- practical expectations,
- finding answers to the mysteries of faith

example incidents: ‘You know, that it is difficult for a preacher to preach about. Like the resurrection of those people on the day that Jesus died. What happened to them? I don’t know[...] And the preacher said, well, I can’t answer that question. Yes, he is right, it’s a mystery.’ (Marc);

‘It’s great to take things from a sermon into my activities among the youth in the church, such as the image of the seed provided by the preacher. Guys, let’s plant some seed!’ (Caroline)

Attentive listening

Listeners are able to follow the sermon or they lack attention. The mental focus of the listener is directed towards the subject matter of the sermon or the performance of the preacher. Attention is forced when listeners must put some effort in staying concentrated; attention is facilitated when the sermon has qualities that help the listener to follow the sermon. Concentration as mental act is the conscious production of attention by the will of the listener; as mental state concentration is a state of being captured by the sermon. Distance (see below) seems to be an explanatory variable: the more distance there is between the sermon and the listener’s lived-faith, the more conscious forcing is needed to stay concentrated.

Distance between hearer and sermon

In the intrapersonal conversation with the sermon the listener measures the ‘distance’ between the sermon and himself: sermons feel very distant or come very close. Distance is the experienced gap between the said or the performed in the sermon on the one hand, and the listener, his feelings, thoughts, and context on the other. ‘He brings a message but it is not personal’, as one listener says. Compared to the previous properties of connecting with the sermon, distance influences cultivating faith and instrumentalising the sermon, while

in a revelatory moment there seems hardly any distance between the listener and what is being said in the sermon. Distance is not just individual, hearing in community broadens the perspective and distance also points to how the sermon relates to other members of the community or the confessional identity of the congregation.³⁶

Revelatory moments in hearing

Listeners participate in a revelatory event. In listening there is the sense of another world; the struggle of everyday life is not the end of things ultimately. Hearers feel elevated to new heights that transcend beyond the here and now. A revelatory moment is a moment in listening to the sermon in which the listener becomes aware of God's presence. This moment of illumination is characterised by a high level of involvement on the part of the listener. There is a phenomenal element of awareness of God, in which life in the here and now is transcended, put into perspective. It generates a feeling of basic trust 'everything will be all right'; it comes with a new seeing, the experience of being put into another dimension beyond the trivialities of life. The language in which respondents starts to talk is phenomenal, affective, rather than reflective. The listener starts to think about what is being said of God in relation to his own life. He reports back how God accepts him, despite 'me not living according to the rules'.

example codes:

- seeing beyond the here and now,
- sacred moment,
- the sermon generates hope,
- new insights,
- feeling of being accepted by God

example incidents: 'As a human being you've so many errors. And then in the sermon you hear that you're important to Him (God), despite that you have erred so many times.' (Deborah);
'I think, o yes, that's why I am in church, that I see that it's not all about this life, but that it's leading somewhere. That, there is a purpose; also in the things that bother you here.' (Caroline)

5.2.5 What is religiously going on in the data?

The core variable in a substantive area 'can be any kind of theoretical code: a process, a typology, a continuum, a range, dimensions, conditions, consequences and so forth. Its primary function is to integrate the theory and render it dense and saturated.'³⁷ In the previous section I presented the eight categories of cultivating faith, distance between listener and sermon, attentive listening, hearing in community etc. These categories express aspects, dimensions, and processes

36. Some of these tentative relationships are visualised in figure 5.3.

37. Holton, 'Coding', p. 279.

in terms of which the main concern of hearers may be assessed. Though the core variable emerges during the cycles of selective and theoretical coding, even in the cycle of open coding this third analytic question helps to stay open for its appearance. One of the criteria³⁸ is that it reoccurs in the data. So from the very start the question ‘what is religiously going on’ is relevant. We have to remind ourselves, however, that its answer is very provisional and tentative at this stage of the research.

In the previous sections we saw how the idea of ‘connecting with the sermon’ emerged as a meaningful category to understand what goes on in hearing a sermon. The connection between the listener, sermon and salvation integrated the three analytic clusters that were offered to structure open coding analysis.³⁹ All sorts of connections occur: communicative connections, between listener and various aspects of the sermon; intrapersonal connections between the listener and his own situated life of faith; and connections between the sermon and the reality of salvation. Especially the latter denotes the religious quality of hearing per se. The sermon connects the listener with a reality that is broader than the listener’s own religious ideas, it transcends the communicative relationship between listener and preacher, and it (re)connects the listener with what he believes of God or how he believes in God. This kind of connection may be termed ‘salvific’ or ‘redemptive’. These notions are more substantial than a more formal notion like ‘religious’. They presuppose a specific Christian framework. Three considerations are relevant here. First, the conceptualisation is theologically tentative. At this stage I interchangeably use both salvific or redemptive connection to denote the specific religious quality of connecting with the sermon without assuming a detailed dogmatic framework. Further, its methodological tentativeness entails that the conceptualisation is open for revision in the next cycles of research. Thirdly, we have to move towards a more substantial conceptualisation for theoretical reasons. Salvation and redemption are such substantial ideas and they seem rather fit to be applied to the data at hand.

Let me recall the three sermon listening incidents I referred to earlier:⁴⁰

What did the minister say last time, let’s see, he said something like: ‘I have to include myself here’. See, actually he asked himself: did I think about Christ today? You know, I have that too. Many times, I think that myself as well. Look, I have been so busy with all kinds of everyday stuff. (Judith)

38. See further section 5.3.4 on page 144.

39. See table 5.3 on page 123.

40. See table 4.2. These incidents are not randomly chosen but reflect the first specific and personalised incidents that were found in the initial sample, see page 92.

The communicative connection is evident here: the listener connects with the self-expression of the preacher in the sermon. The intrapersonal connection is also clear: an intrapersonal conversation takes place in which the listener critically examines her own life of faith. The religious quality of connecting, however, is prevalent in the idea that the sermon makes her think about her relation to Christ. The self-expression of the preacher is a means for the hearer to critically engage with her own situated faith. The connection is salvific or redemptive in the sense that in sharing his own struggles of faith the preacher helps the listener to understand and reflect on his own faith. The sermon generates the comfort that maintaining the relation with Christ is a communal struggle and strengthens her in renewing her commitment to Christ.

Next, a completely different listening experience indicates a similar pattern of a salvific connection between the sermon and the hearer:

In the last sermon, with Easter, he [the preacher] talked about all four evangelists on the suffering of Christ and his resurrection. Well, I find that interesting. Because I am also someone, you know, I have something with history. Like, oh, how great does it fit together. Is Luke the earliest? Oh, Mark. [...] I like it the way the minister presents it as a whole. I told him that it touched me. It makes me think. Because those people who wrote the gospels were also human beings. (Ronald)

Again the intrapersonal (it makes me think) and the communicative connections (I liked the minister's presentation) are at the surface of this incident. Further, on two levels the fragment also indicates a religiously qualified kind of connecting. The sermon helps the listener to connect with the biblical text and the reality of salvation. On the level of the biblical text, the sermon produces insights in the coherence of the biblical text and bridges the historical gap between the authors of the gospels and the listener when he begins to see them as fellow human beings. On a deeper level, Easter and Christ are religiously loaded categories. So salvific connection here entails that the sermon generates a deeper understanding of the biblical text and creates an awareness of the Christ-event that those texts attest to.

Finally, the third incident is most obviously an example of redemptive connecting:

Last sunday, the minister spoke about the resurrection, that passage from Paul about the seed. Like seed comes up [...] And then he said: I wish I had brought some seed with me. I thought: well, I wish you'd done it! Something to visualise. I never forget that sermon. Because he explained it like, you know, you would never believe that a beautiful flower would grow from such seed. But in fact, the resurrection will be just like that. The Lord Jesus Christ is the first and that's what we see, we do know it, because it's some kind of natural law that comes back all the time. When something dies, something new takes its place.

Well, that was an eyeopener for me. Because the preacher took this example, it became so lively. (Caroline)

Again, communicative connection (the imaginative rendering of the text through the image of the seed) and the intrapersonal (I thought...) are indicated in the incident. The religious connection is also very explicit. The sermon creates a salvific connection that is grounded in the resurrection of Christ, being imagined in the sermon, and the hearer is reassured in her belief in Christ-being-the-first. This reassurance is prevalent in the epistemic notions she employs: that's what we see and we do know it. The point here is not whether she is epistemically justified in saying this but rather that the connection that happens in hearing the sermon is redemptive: in Christ new life radically overcomes death.

When Grounded Theory is written, concepts become more and more integrated. The theoretical relationship between concepts is expressed in hypotheses. The main procedures for integration and hypothesis formation are dealt with in the third cycle of coding when memos are sorted and theoretical codes emerge in the sorting process.⁴¹ The idea of salvific or redemptive connecting is rather tentative at this stage and with its surrounding 8 categories it is hardly a theoretical framework yet. Still, they are a snapshot of the research at this stage. The idea of religious connecting indicates an important pattern in the data and in the next cycles of sampling, coding and reflection in theoretical memos this idea is further pursued. We will see that the concept itself will evolve from redemptive connecting to actualising faith (see section 5.4). The analytic result at this stage is presented in figure 5.3.

The diagram includes a few hypotheses concerning the relationship between the core idea of salvific connecting and its surrounding 8 categories. An hypothesis drafts a relationship between two theoretical ideas. Figure 5.3 presents five of those relationships. A first hypothesis is that *religious connecting* entails the *shaping of an intentionality of faith* [HYP. 1]. When religious connecting occurs, the listener's mind is directed towards the reality of God. In hearing a sermon the believer's mind is (re)shaped in relation to religious realities. So it seems that connecting has an intentionality-dimension.

Further, in hearing a listener feels connected or less connected with the sermon. When attentiveness is high on the part of the listener, the distance is small and the listeners feels very connected with the sermon. When the sermon evokes a thought or a stream of thought on the part of the listener that makes him engage in a rather self-contained intrapersonal conversation, the distance between hearer and sermon grows. A second theoretical hypothesis thus emerges: a *self-involved intrapersonal conversation* and *attentive listening* represent two

41. See the methodical literature, Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 115–120 and B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Coding. The Grounded Theory Perspective*, volume 3. (Sociology Press, 2005), pp. 33–40.

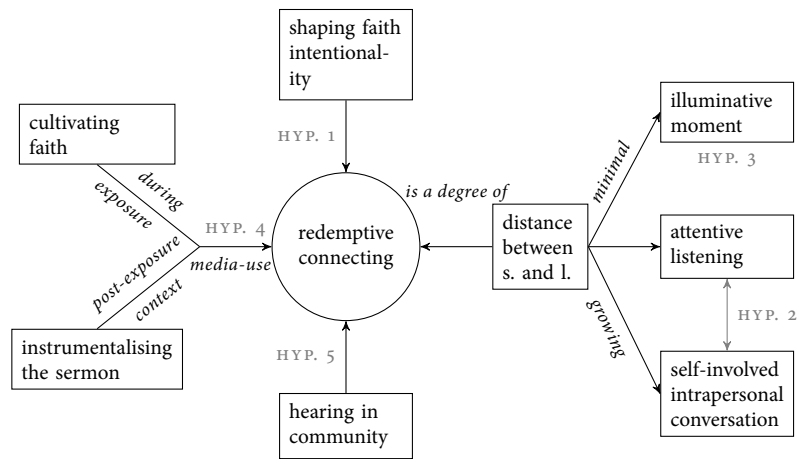


Figure 5.3 Open coding analytic model

opposite degrees of connecting with the sermon [HYP. 2]. These different degrees of connection depend on the *distance between hearer and sermon*. How the *distance between hearer and sermon* decreases or increases will be studied in the next round of sampling and analysis. Besides these two degrees of connecting, there is evidence in the data that indicates a minimal kind of distance between hearer and sermon, in which an intense moment of salvific connection between the hearer and the sermon happens. This moment has revelatory qualities. This suggests a third hypothesis: an illuminative moment is an intense moment of ‘redemptive’ connection between hearer and sermon [HYP. 3].

A fourth theoretical hypothesis relates to communication theory. Theories on audience-behaviour distinguish between media-use during exposure (such as enjoyment in watching a movie) and media-use in the post-exposure context (such as expression of personality by talking about the movie at a party) [HYP. 4].⁴² The categories *cultivating faith* and *instrumentalising the sermon* seem to fit this distinction: during the worship service hearers use sermons to cultivate their faith. They feel strengthened in their relationship with Christ, are at home in the common faith of the Church, and experience affirmation in their Christian calling. Beyond the service the sermon functions as an instrument in the post-exposure situation of everyday life to implement Christian practices and to help believers act Christianly.

Finally, an important pattern in the data suggests that hearing extends beyond the individual hearer. Previous studies on sermon reception usually studied

42. D. McQuail, *Audience Analysis*. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 61.

listeners atomically, as an aggregate of individuals.⁴³ A fifth hypothesis addresses the relation between redemptive connecting with the sermon and the idea of *hearing in community* [HYP. 5]. An interesting pattern is visible in the data when listeners admit that the sermon did not particular concern their individual needs but in hearing they realised that the sermon could be very helpful for someone in the congregation they knew. To explore this idea more, I need more data to compare. Here theoretical sampling comes in view and thus a next cycle of research.

5.3 SELECTIVE CODING: FROM CONCEPTS TO CATEGORIES

The adequacy of ‘connecting’ may be discussed or refined, new properties of connecting may emerge and the 8 surrounding categories may shift places or be replaced by other more relevant concepts.⁴⁴ Sampling and coding thus take place in close reflective interaction with the emerging framework. Selective coding, Holton aptly summarizes, ‘begins only after the researcher has identified a potential core variable. Subsequent data collection and coding is delimited to that which is relevant to the emerging conceptual framework (the core and those categories that relate to the core).’⁴⁵ The tentative core category of ‘connecting’ points to the main interest in hearing a sermon. Yet this core category is reformulated, categories are shifted when new material is added and compared to the emerging framework. Besides coding (5.3.2), three additional procedures move the analysis forward: theoretical sampling (5.3.1), memoing (5.3.3), and formulating the core variable that explains most of the variety in the data (5.3.4).

5.3.1 Theoretical sampling

New material is collected to focus on the analytic properties of the categories that have emerged.⁴⁶ Theoretical sampling is thus a deductive procedure since

43. See H. Pieterse, *Gemeente en prediking*. (NGKB, 1991) for a more communal approach to preaching. Cf. also R. Bohren, *Preaching and community*. (Richmond, Virginia, 1965).

44. The differences between concepts, properties and categories are highly debated in GT literature, see for a critical appraisal I. Dey, *Grounding Grounded Theory. Guidelines for Qualitative Inquiry*. (Academic Press, 1999). For a more balanced approach, see U. Kelle, ‘The Development of Categories: Different Approaches in Grounded Theory’, in: K. Charmaz and A. Bryant, editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007). – chapter 9.

45. Holton, ‘Coding’, p. 280.

46. K. Charmaz, ‘Grounded Theory. Objectivist and Constructivist Methods’, in: N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, editors, *Handbook of Qualitative Research. Second Edition*. (London: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 105.

sampling decisions are based upon emerging categories.⁴⁷ So selecting new respondents is guided by the concepts that have been formulated.

Based on the hypotheses above (section 5.2.5), two concepts guide the generation of new data: *hearing in community* and the *distance between hearer and sermon* during listening. This selection is motivated by the fact that they generate new insights compared to more deductively oriented homiletical studies. First, studies on sermon reception usually take the listener as an individual unit—his psychological make-up or his evaluation of the sermon. As we have seen, an important feature of redemptive connecting, however, is that hearing takes place in relationship with fellow-believers (hypothesis 5). So sampling takes place in two directions: listeners that are very much involved in community life (for instance by attending a midweek-biblestudy-group) and those that are less involved. Further, in contemporary homiletics the ‘meaning-making listener’ figures as dominant concept for sermon reception. Meaning making, however, could take place in close interaction with the sermon but also in a rather autonomous intrapersonal conversation that is nonetheless initiated or triggered by the sermon (hypothesis 2). For instance, when listeners are very much self-involved due to a critical situation in their personal life, they are more likely to move away from the sermon. Hence, according to the second sampling decision listeners have been included in the sample who recently went through a dramatic period in their lives.

name	gender	age group	theoretical sampling	marital status	congregation type	interv. design
Lydia	f	young	none	single	mainstream	1+2
Eric	m	middle	not involved	married	orthodox	1+2
Shana	f	elderly	dramatic experience	widowed	orthodox	1+2
Jonathan	m	young	not involved	married	orthodox	1+2
John	m	elderly	involved	single	mainstream	3
Elly	f	middle	dramatic experience	divorced	mainstream	3

Table 5.4 Samples (2.1, 3.1 and 3.2) with new respondents for selective coding

In sum, the hypotheses of ‘distance’ and ‘hearing in community’ provide two criteria for theoretical sampling: (1) those who experience hardship are

47. For the deductive nature of theoretical sampling, see Glaser, *Doing*, p. 35, p. 95 and Ch. 10; also Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 38–39. For other types of sampling in qualitative inquiry, see J. M. Morse, ‘Sampling in Grounded Theory’ in: K. Charmaz and A. Bryant, editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007). – chapter 11, pp. 234–235 and J. Mason, *Qualitative Researching. Second edition*. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 121–127. Also section 1.4.2 on page 16.

likely to engage in a more self-absorbed intrapersonal conversation; and (2) those who attend other meetings in church (like a biblestudy-group). Table 5.4 presents basic information concerning the respondents in the cycle of selective coding. The third column is particularly relevant here. It contains information on theoretical sampling. Two values are apparent: *(not) involved* points to the concept of ‘hearing in community’; *dramatic experience* points to a recent negatively assessed change in the personal situation and connects to the concept ‘intrapersonal conversation’. The final column indicates the type of interview design that is used for the conversation(s) with the respondent. The cycle of selective coding thus consists of interviews with 11 respondents, including 6 new respondents.

The final column in table 5.4 gives information on the interview designs. Changing the interview design is another method for theoretical sampling.⁴⁸ Based upon the emerging categories, the interview designs become more structured and theoretically loaden. A more structured interview designs helps to saturate specific categories and their properties. The second interview design focussed on the question what the listener would have missed if he would not have heard last Sunday’s sermon. The third interview design was completely built around the two core variables that emerged during selective coding: ‘entering the world of the sermon’ and ‘redefining faith’. Hence all sampling decisions were based in close interaction with and reflection on the previous analyses. During selective coding all three designs were used.

After the first sample of open coding I collected a second and third sample of selective coding. Four new respondents⁴⁹ were interviewed according to the first interview-design (sample 2.1). This enabled me to both start selective coding without running the risk of closing the cycle of open coding too quickly and to stay open for new categories and properties. Next, the five previous respondents were interviewed for a second time according to the second interview-design in order to saturate the properties of redemptive connecting (sample 2.2). The interviews in sample two were transcribed, coded and memos were written.

Finally, the third sample also consists of two components, starting with another interview with the four new respondents according to the second interview-design (sample 3.1). New categories were formulated and a new tentative theoretical framework emerged. Based on this new analysis I designed a third type of interview, contacted a new congregation—a larger parish-church in one of the cities—and interviewed two respondents accordingly (sample 3.2).⁵⁰ In sum, sample 2 and 3 during selective coding thus differ both geographically

48. In figure 5.1 I introduced the three interview designs. See also table 4.1 on page 89.

49. Lydia, Eric, Shana, and Jonathan.

50. John and Elly.

interview	congregation		
	A	B	C
design 1	sample 2.2	sample 2.2	
design 2	sample 2.1	sample 2.1	
	sample 3.1	sample 3.1	
design 3			sample 3.2

Table 5.5 Sets of respondents during selective coding

(the samples were taken in different congregations) and methodically (the sets of respondents were created on the basis of different interview designs). Table 5.5 presents the various sets of respondents according to the two samples. All interviews were conducted between spring 2003 and spring 2005.

5.3.2 Coding for specification and saturation

Coding new material generates two different sets of concepts. First, new data provides ample resources for finding new aspects and concepts within the substantive area. In other words, the researcher stays open for new ideas and new categories besides the categories that have been formulated in the previous cycle. A second set of categories concerns the existing categories as they become theoretically saturated. This means that new material is added until no new properties emerge. In the light of the new data existing categories are reformulated. Comparison thus takes place on two levels now. New material is compared to the previously generated data to find new patterns in the data (incident-to-incident comparison). New material is also compared to the emerging categories in order to find new properties of those conceptual bits and pieces (incident-to-code comparison).

When codes emerge open coding gradually changes into selective coding: new incidents of data are compared to the codes that have emerged. So selective coding builds upon the categories that have been tentatively formulated during open coding. Another feature of selective coding is that the process of constant interaction between data, categories, and reflections on categories is captured in theoretical memos that suggest relationships between incidents, codes, and categories.⁵¹ While selective coding builds on the results of open coding as starting point for coding new material, the researcher stays open for new categories. Hence various new conceptual ideas emerge while comparing and coding goes on. I mention a few—from a list of nearly 80 new codes: the

51. Charmaz, *Constructing*, pp. 57–63.

sermon makes you think, knowing the preacher, climate of listening, existential confrontation, retaining the sermon, open to listen, life-world aboutness of the sermon, moment of experience, and critical times in life.

First, these new codes add properties to previously formulated ideas, namely the five hypotheses that emerged from open coding. For example, the category 'shaping a faith intentionality' becomes saturated when during selective coding on this category various intentionalities emerge (see table 5.6). When coding an interview-fragment with a code like 'life-world aboutness of the sermon', the idea of faith intentionality is conceptually broken down into several types. Besides the life-world aboutness of the sermon, listeners also address the 'textual' and the 'kerugmatic aboutness' of the sermon. Interestingly, these aspects are not reducible to each other. Shaping the intentionality of faith in listening comes in three kinds: gospel-related, text-related, and actual-life-related. Further, what kind of aboutness is mentioned varies from listener to listener. Those who heard the same sermon differ in their perception of its aboutness. Some stress its textuality, others its life-world relatedness.

Selective coding goes on until the category is saturated. Saturation can mean two things: no new properties emerge or the various incidents are interchangeable.⁵² With the three kinds of sermon-aboutness from the perspective of the listener, the category seems saturated. So when listeners reflect on the substance of the sermon, they talk about three different kinds of sermon contents: sermons are about present-day life; in sermons the gospel of Jesus Christ is transmitted; and listeners hear (new) explanations of the Scriptures. Though this seems obvious at the first sight, it gives ample room for new homiletic reflections: how do these three aboutnesses connect in a real sermon, how do listeners connect them in hearing, what do homiletic manuals teach about their interrelatedness, what does it mean for the meaning making activities of listeners when meaning is crafted into one of these three modes?

All five hypotheses that were formulated during open coding are dealt with similarly. First, the idea of 'hearing in community' (hyp. 5) generated various categories that changed its place in the theory. It was not pursued as a central category in itself anymore. The communal dimension in listening emerged as a property of various other categories: The competence of the listener has a communal quality such as *the acquaintance with preaching as religious practice*; the receptivity of the listener is determined by the communal aspect of *participation in worship*. Second, the idea of the distance between listener and sermon (hyp. 2) was communal too: in hearing a sermon listeners do not exclusively think about themselves but some also wonder what the sermon may mean for fellow-believers. Further, the category of distance also has properties that

52. For the latter, see Glaser, *Doing*, p. 26.

sermon-listening-incident	selective coding for 'shaping faith intentionality'
Shana— Last Sunday, for instance, the sermon was about <i>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain</i> [Phil. 1, 21].	textual aboutness
He, so pointedly, said: what do you write down? Me or Christ? Like that, you know. I keeping thinking about a sermon like that for an entire week. Every day it pops up again: what do I write down?	kerugmatic aboutness
I— The question he posed?	
Shana— Me or Christ? Well, and then there is the doubt. The doubt of knowing for certain, I have that very much, yes.	
I— The question made you think?	situated receptivity (new)
Shana— Very much so. Before [her husband died a few months before the interview], I had that too, momentarily. But now, these things [of faith] keep me thinking all the time.	
Deborah— That's typical for our minister. He preaches on very topical subjects. Really. These are the things that happen, and thus we are going to deal with them.	life-world aboutness
I— The sermon is about those things?	
Deborah— Yes, very often. Yes. [...] Take for example fair trade coffee. We had an activity on that, well, then they put a huge basket with fair trade products in church.	
The preacher made a trip to South-Africa, a couple of times he traveled to South-America. He puts that in the sermon, yes. That made it a very present-day sermon. It speaks to me.	personality of the preacher (new)
Eric— What I like most, I don't know why, are passages from the Old Testament. They speak to me more than the New Testament. I can't say why. Perhaps the Old Testament is more abstract, has more hidden messages. Actually, I don't know why [...] The New Testament is about Jesus and his ideas; I like that.	textual aboutness
I do know quite a lot about the New Testament, but the Old Testament is less familiar. Then I think: well, great. A story. History. Usually there is more behind the story than you think beforehand.	listening competence (new)

Table 5.6 Incidents for selective coding. (1) The larger category of 'shaping faith intentionality' is broken into three parts: textual, kerugmatic, and life-world. (2) Three new categories emerged.

concern the personality of the preacher in the sermon, whether listening is an affirmative or a confronting experience, or whether listening is an activity that is worthwhile in itself (enjoying the sermon) or that is mainly functional (using the sermon). Methodically, these two hypotheses (hearing in community, distance between listener and sermon) both directed sampling and were broken into various other categories rather than gaining a 'stand-alone' conceptual position in the emerging theory. Concerning the remaining two hypotheses, on illumination (hyp. 3) and on the listener's use of the sermon (hyp. 4) similar methods were applied.

Thus in a sense open coding never stops. Grounding theory in data methodically entails that the researcher *always* remains open to new categories or concepts. Focussing the analysis necessarily includes the selection of a few core categories to saturate them, while the inductive tendency of Grounded Theory remains operative at the background. This is why Barney Glaser stresses the modifiability of Grounded Theory. New data and fresh incidents could always contain new insights, ideas, concepts and must be compared to the existing categories and subsequently be woven into the emerging theoretical framework. There is a tension between this inductive drive and the need for focus, selection and a theoretical centre. Though methodologically unresolved, both pragmatic reasoning and clear methodical procedures help to find a focus without forcing the data into a premature analytic framework. Examples of other concepts that were generated during selective coding concern the (religious) personality of the preacher in the sermon, liturgical listening (see section 5.3.3, the first example of memoing), and praying for openness.

Two newly generated and important categories around the central concept of 'redemptive connecting' are: 'situated receptiveness' and 'listening competence' (see table 5.6). *Situated receptiveness* is indicated in the interviews when listeners talk about how they entered the service, their mood and expectations at the moment of going to church, their life-situation, and how they generally relate to the congregation and if they feel at home in the regular services. These indicators—or: codes generated as open codes in the second cycle of sampling and coding—point to an important pattern in the data that did not emerge during the first analytic cycle and concerns the receptiveness of the listener, his readiness to listen, or circumstances that block the listener from being open to listen to the sermon. Further, the *listening competence* of the listener concerns his acquaintance with the phenomenon of preaching and the ability to understand the language of faith. Very competent listeners do not complain about the language or are very motivated to keep following the sermon, others, however, talk about their background in which they were not very much acquainted with worshipping in church and find it hard to concentrate or to get into the jargon of faith. The fact that these two categories did not turn up during the previous round

of analysis may be explained by theoretical sampling. The new sample contained both very committed listeners (Caroline and John) and those that were not very much involved in church-life (Jonathan and Deborah). This may account for the fact that the competence of listening was more prominently present in the data. Similarly, the sample included a listener (Shana) that had recently gone through a dramatic period in her life. Especially the interviews with this listener focussed the attention on the fact that receptivity is an important aspect of connecting with the sermon.

5.3.3 Memoing

Theoretical memos are based upon descriptions and they 'raise that description to the theoretical level through the conceptual rendering of the material'.⁵³ Memos accumulate in two ways: in the beginning a memo consists of just a few lines of capturing ideas and thoughts on conceptual connections and properties of the category. Later they become more extensive, include literature on the field and connect properties into a more integrated whole. Methodologists usually distinguish between conceptual, theoretical, and methodological memos. Memos may contain all sorts of material: reflections on individual listeners, in-depth comparisons of several listeners, conceptual relationships and hypotheses, literature reviews in relation to the emerging theory etc. The number of memos can easily grow towards 150 or more.⁵⁴ In a later stage, during theoretical coding, memos are sorted, new memos are written on conceptual relationships and turned into chapters and sections of the final manuscript.

In this section I give examples of four memos⁵⁵, each indicating a different function of memoing in the research process. The first memo on liturgical listening illustrates the development of a category during the research process (the *emerging of a category* function of memoing). The conceptual level of a category grows and the category is more precisely formulated. The second memo on illocutionary areas shows how empirical analysis is integrated with literature on the subject (the *integrating literature*-function). The third memo on getting religiously involved in the sermon shows how various properties become integrated into one category (the *theory formation*-function of memoing). Finally, the fourth memo presents profiles of listeners on how they redefine their faith in listening to a sermon (the *profile*-function of memoing).

53. Holton, 'Coding', p. 282.

54. At some stages in the project, my Atlas.ti database contained 212 memos.

55. These memos are reconstructed from the original memos that have largely been written in Dutch; further, for the sake of publication they have been restructured and rephrased.

Memo example 1

The memo on *liturgical listening* illustrates the development of a category from the early stage of open coding (function of the sermon) to its theoretical rendering during the process of research (from ritual to liturgical listening). The memo provides the theoretical distinctions that are further presented in Chapter 7.2.

MEMO:	liturgical-immediate listening	(conceptual memo)
	<p>The generation of the liturgical-immediate dimension of sermon listening took four steps of reflection, adding new material and comparing with literature. The interplay of coding, reflecting, literature and discussion generated the final tentative concept of liturgical-immediate listening.</p> <p>1. Open coding lead to the idea that, from the perspective of listeners, sermons have various 'functions'. Among these functions are 'enjoying the sermon' and 'listening because of listening (intrinsic value)'. These functions were coded during the cycle of open coding. Do these functions point to emotional states? Is there an 'aesthetic function of the sermon'? What about an <i>intrinsic function of the sermon</i>?</p> <p>2. I wrote a memo on <i>the experience of listening</i> qua listening. Listening seems to have an intrinsic value beyond the more extrinsic value of retention.</p> <p>The listening-experience is worthwhile in itself and the notion of experience captures incidents in the material on 'nice sermon', 'enjoyable sermon' etc. Listeners talk about the intrinsic value of hearing a sermon albeit that many of them are not able to retain the actual contents of the sermon afterwards. While there is hardly any retention, the listening experience has a quality of its own.</p> <p>This idea of a 'listening experience' challenges the fact that in the literature sermon reception has usually been studied from the perspective of retention. This was confirmed by new incidents in the data. It seemed that an important and overlooked dimension of listening emerges.</p> <p>3. When putting the idea of the listening-experience into perspective, two leads in the literature were followed.</p> <p>First, homiletics occasionally frames preaching in sacramental terms. So, does the listening experience have sacramental quality?</p> <p>Secondly, in communication literature a distinction is made between message-oriented approaches and a ritual approach to communication, cf. McQuail and Windahl 1993, pp. 54-55. Does the category of the listening-experience fit the ritual category? That would nicely combine the theological (sacramental) and communication (ritual) dimensions.</p> <p>Hence, I moved from the category of experience towards the idea of <i>ritual listening</i> and I distinguished between ritual and reflective listening. In a paper for the annual meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in Williamsburg, VA (2005) I presented the emerging category.</p> <p>4. Soon it became clear, however, that ritual or sacramental language puts too much emphasis on the performative or institutional-theological aspects. Listening is not a sacrament nor a ritual. If so, who would be performing the ritual? Though the literature helped to focus the conceptualisation, the category itself had not been properly formulated yet. Discussing this with my supervisor led to the concept of <i>liturgical-immediate listening</i>.</p>	

Memo continued on next page

Listeners experience the sermon as part of the liturgical act. It has profound communal and ritual characteristics. The liturgical dimension still captures the original idea, namely the intrinsic value of listening. The addition 'immediate' indicates the phenomenal quality of listening since it lacks a reflective operation on the part of the listener.

Memo example 2

The memo on *illocutionary areas* shows how empirical analysis and existing literature are combined into a new theoretical notion. The aboutness of the sermon from the perspective of the listener is connected to a Searlian approach to mental states and speech-acts. This memo has been foundational for section 8.3.

MEMO:	Illocutionary areas in the sermon	(literature memo)
	<p>When listeners address the contents of the sermon (its aboutness), they talk about how the text of the Scriptures functioned in the sermon (textual aboutness), or how the sermon dealt with issues related to the life-world of the listeners (life-world aboutness), or how elements of the Christian gospel were communicated in the sermon (kerugmatic aboutness). These three modes, in which the contents of the sermon are perceived, break down the larger category of 'shaping the intentionality of faith' into smaller theoretical pieces.</p> <p>Coding with notions as 'intentionality' or 'aboutness' is not neutral since the notions have a rich theoretical history. This study is hardly speech-act driven albeit that I dealt with the theory in Chapter 2. For examples that frame sermon reception research in speech-act theory, see the studies by the Hannover research group, <i>Predigen und Hören</i>, 1980-1991. Lukatis' and Daiber's article (Perception of speech-acts in sermons, 1978) studies whether or not listeners are able to identify the speech-acts that were performed in the sermon.</p> <p>John Searle connected aboutness in communication (propositional acts) and mental states (intentionality) in several studies, see his <i>Intentionality</i> (1983) and <i>Mind, Language and Society</i> (1998). In his works on speech-acts, he argues, that illocutions are the primary bearers of meaning in human communication. See his <i>Speech Acts</i> (1969).</p> <p>I do not test speech-act theory here, nor do I apply it to sermon reception. It seems, however, adequate to borrow the idea of the 'illocution' to capture the fact that listeners address the aboutness of the sermon when they talk about how they remember the sermon, how the sermon made them feel or think, or how the sermon directed their minds towards the Scriptures, Christ or some 'thing' in their here-and-now situation.</p> <p>The notion 'illocutionary area' may help here: the sermon touches on areas that concern Scripture (textual area), the gospel of Christ (kerugmatic area) and the actual situation of the listeners (life-world area). Listeners recognize these areas, they inhabit them, or they connect with these areas. The notion of 'area' helps to conceive of the preaching event in more spatial terms.</p>	

Memo example 3

The memo on *getting religiously involved* demonstrates how properties of categories are integrated into a larger theoretical whole. Involvement consists of three sub-processes: experiencing, perceiving, and identifying. This memo has been very important to generate the three main processes during listening to a sermon. These processes are presented in the Chapters 7 to 9. Actually, this memo was constructed during the process of sorting, which is dealt with in the next section. For illustrative purposes though, I present it here.

MEMO:	Getting religiously involved in the sermon	(integrating theory)
	<p>It seems that between the stages of 'opening up' (was: entering the sermon) and 'actualising faith' (was: redefining faith), another stage occurs: listeners become involved in the sermon. Getting involved is an important integrating notion. It integrates incidents on the experience of listening, perceiving the sermon and identifying with the sermon. Involvement is a rather formal notion though. How do the concepts relate to involvement?</p> <p><i>Religious experience</i>: see the memos on listening in a meditative environment, using or enjoying the sermon, ritual or liturgical listening. These memos point to the experiential dimension of listening. (Chapter 7)</p> <p><i>Religious attentiveness</i>: see the memos on the aboutness of the sermon or illocutionary areas, the dialects between here-and-now versus eschatologically orientated faith, and the intensity of listening. These concepts point to a process of perception. How does perception relate to understanding or meaning-making? More data are needed. (Chapter 8)</p> <p><i>Religious engagement</i>: Listeners express a need for personal involvement: it's for me. This engagement, existential involvement or identification with the sermon can be both affirmative or confronting. See memos on identification, affirmation versus confrontation, the encounter-dimension of actualising faith. There is a sub-process in which the listener identifies with the world that is 'built' in the sermon. (Chapter 9)</p> <p>These dimensions of involvement suggest the following taxonomy: getting religiously involved in the sermon consists of three sub-processes: experiencing the sermon (experiential involvement), perceiving the sermon (attentive involvement), identifying with the sermon (existential involvement).</p>	

Memo example 4

The memo on *profiles of redefining faith* exemplifies what Fred Wester has called the 'profile chart', a 'brief summary of the data on one particular research unit in terms of the (tentative) analytic framework'.⁵⁶ The memo summarizes the positions of respondents on one particular issue, namely the way they redefine

56. F. Wester, *Strategieën voor kwalitatief onderzoek*. 3rd edition. (Bussum: Coutinho, 1995), pp. 51–52.

their faith in relation to the sermon. This memo contains the rudimentary theoretical ideas for the typology that is presented in Chapter 10. The memo bridges the gap between descriptions of individual listeners and conceptualisation of listening behaviour.

MEMO:	Profiles of redefining faith	(profile-memo)
	<p>During the cycle of open coding two concepts emerged that particularly indicate how the <i>orientation of faith</i> is involved in listening: 1. shaping the intentionality of faith, and 2. cultivating faith. During the interview the listener reflects on the impact of the sermon in relation to his or her faith. How does the sermon shape the listener's faith?</p> <p>Sermon-listening incidents show how listeners redefine their faith in terms of the sermon's impact. For each listener a dominant redefinition is put into a brief profile. These profiles are thus reconstructions of reflections by the listener on the interaction between their faith and the exposure to the sermon. (I prefer 'profile' above 'reconstruction' because the individual listener is in view rather than a conceptual notion.)</p> <p>The following three 'profiles' of redefining faith are grounded in some incidents in the data, they connect to the ideas of shaping the intentionality of faith and cultivating faith (open coding), and a label is offered to denote the specific style or profile.</p> <p><i>Caroline: celebrating faith</i> When Caroline talks about the impact of the sermon, she explains that she sometimes just 'enjoys listening'. Through the sermon 'you see again what you believe'. The sermon lifts you up and helps you to see beyond the here-and-now. The language Caroline employs is phenomenal. On 'shaping faith intentionality' Caroline offers a distinction between the here-and-now direction of faith and an eschatological orientation. On 'cultivating' the sermon builds the eschatological orientation, so that the listener enjoys the perspective that is offered. Celebrating salvation, seems an appropriate label.</p> <p><i>Shana: faith confronted</i> Shana feels confronted by the sermon. She notes how the preacher asks a very determining and pointed question and she tells how she liked it. Strangely enough, she liked it because it confronted rather than comforted her. She feels confronted by the question whether she trusts Christ fully and though it does make her feel uncertain, the sermon has an enormous impact on her. In terms of shaping faith intentionality, Shana's profile is both confronting and eschatologically oriented. The confronting style of the sermon is something that keeps her faith alive.</p> <p><i>Ronald: tested faith</i> According to Ronald sermons present the life of Christ paradigmatically. We have to test ourselves, he tells, whether we are like Christ or not. The sermon challenges him to live in the here-and-now according to the norms of Christianity. He redefines his faith in listening when he is challenged in his Christian existence.</p> <p>Is it possible to compare these profiles? What conceptual pattern emerges when I make these comparisons? How do the profiles relate to the larger category of 'getting religiously involved in the sermon'? What other profiles emerge and is there a conceptual idea that structure the profiles into a theoretical framework? Theoretical coding attempts to find answers to these questions.</p>	

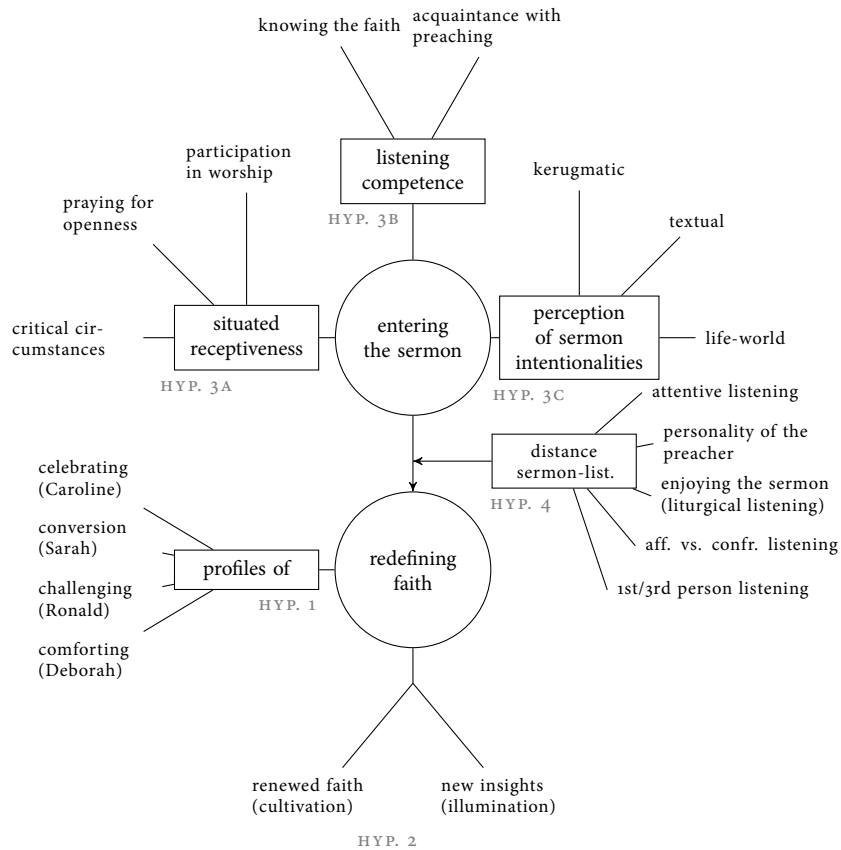


Figure 5.4 Selective coding, conceptual model

5.3.4 Two core variables, four new hypotheses and a diagram

From the combined procedures of selective coding and memoing, two new central concepts emerge. The first cycle of open coding concludes with formulating the idea of 'redemptive connecting' as central concern in listening. In the second cycle, this idea of connecting becomes more differentiated into two separate ideas: in hearing a sermon, the listener *enters the world of the sermon* and subsequently becomes occupied in the process of *redefining faith*. These two new concepts that replace the initial broad idea of 'connecting' give more precise answers to the emerging question of how listeners relate to the sermon and how the sermon makes them interact with their own faith. The two core variables help to articulate further conceptual hypotheses. The relation between the various properties is pictured in model 5.4.

Four new hypotheses are formulated and visually presented in diagram 5.4 on the facing page:

- HYP. 1 in listening listeners redefine their situation of faith according to a personal profile
- HYP. 2 redefinition takes place between renewal of faith and acquiring new insights (cultivation versus illumination)
- HYP. 3 entering the sermon is conditioned by three listener-related aspects: (a) the receptivity and (b) the competence of the listener and his (c) perception of the intentionalities of the sermon.
- HYP. 4 the move from entering the sermon to redefining faith is facilitated by aspects of the distance between sermon and listener

Three substantive ideas are prevalent in these hypotheses: entering the sermon, redefining faith, and the bridge between them. First, *entering the sermon* is conditioned by receptivity, competence and perception respectively. The receptivity of the listener grows according to critical circumstances, prayer for openness, and the participation of the listener in worship [HYP. 3A in diagram 5.4]. The more listeners are embedded in the community of faith, the more they cognitively know, the more they are acquainted with the phenomenon of preaching as a form of religious communication, the better they are equipped to listen and the more competent they are to follow the sermon and to perceive its aboutness [HYP. 3B]. The perception of the sermon goes into three directions: textual, kerugmatic and the actual life-world of the listening community. Each of these directions concerns a different area of interest though interest may be both very individual or rather corporate determined [HYP. 3C].

Next, various variables characterise the move between entering the sermon and redefining faith. Here again the category of *distance between sermon and listener* is invoked. Yet its properties have changed due to its place in the theoretical framework. For now they are treated as 'elements' in the move from entering or being in the sermon towards the individual and corporate implications of the sermon. These elements mainly concern the sermon-listener relationship. Issues at stake are: attention, the religious personality of the preacher in the sermon, the mode of listening (liturgical or functional) or the difference between individual (first person singular) or corporate (third person) listening [HYP. 4].

Finally, in the interviews listeners talk about how the sermon redefined their faith. This *redefinition of faith* takes place between acquiring new insights (illumination) and renewing faith as it already inheres in the believing subject (cultivation). This hypothesis [HYP. 2] both combines and replaces two hypotheses that were formulated during open coding. The redefinition of faith is also a very personal matter it seems. Four profiles are thus added to the framework [HYP. 1]. At this stage I do not have enough evidence to raise the descriptions

of the various profiles of redefining faith to a more conceptual level. This task is postponed to the cycle of theoretical coding assuming that through continued sampling, memoing and sorting a conceptual typology of profiles of redefining faith may be constructed.

5.4 THEORETICAL CODING: FROM CATEGORIES TO THEORY

Two different attempts have been made to formulate a core category: ‘redemptive connecting’ (open coding) and ‘entering the sermon / redefining faith’ (selective coding). Yet these attempts have been primarily based on the *substantial codes* that emerged during comparing and coding the data. There is, however, another coding type that has the ability to integrate concepts into theoretical wholes. Though I have offered hypotheses in the previous cycles to capture the ideas that emerged during analysis, the proper procedure to formulate hypotheses is *theoretical coding*. Theoretical codes have an integrative power that substantial codes do not have. *Entering the sermon* is a great substantial concept but how does it relate to other ideas, such as receptivity and the aboutness of the sermon? Is receptivity a condition or a dimension? What kind of property is the aboutness of the sermon? According to Grounded Theory, codes like dimensions, conditions, cutting points, structures, models, and types are necessary to connect substantial concepts into theoretical statements.⁵⁷

Two incidents from a final sample of 4 respondents illustrate theoretical coding on the level of the concrete data.⁵⁸ As different as the conversations with Anny and Kathy were, they, nonetheless, indicate a similar theoretical pattern in the data. Kathy tells about a very critical situation in her life since her husband recently left her; this situation very much shapes the way in which she hears sermons nowadays. Interesting is her remark that, due to her changed situation, a very encouraging sermon from a few months ago would sound very differently now. ‘I wish to hear that sermon again,’ she says, ‘because what would it mean today that God says that he makes a new start?’ Anny, on the other hand, starts the interview—to my disappointment—with telling that she was not able to hear the sermon because of her responsibilities in Sunday school. Significant, however, is what she says about worship before the sermon begins: ‘It sometimes happens that things go wrong at home just before you go to church. Then there is a kind of tension and you have to get rid of that. Look, that’s why I like the singing.

57. For the difference between substantial and theoretical codes, see section 4.3.2.

58. The final sample consisted of four other respondents from two biblestudy groups in a fourth, more evangelically oriented congregation. Anny, William, Grace, and Kathy were all interviewed according to the third interview design, based upon the two central categories of entering the sermon and redefining faith. See appendix A. The respondents were selected according to the same criteria as mentioned earlier (see section 5.3.1).

It's a way of coming closer to God, to open up.' This fragment not only helps to develop the concept of 'opening up' yet it demonstrates—like Kathy's remarks on the critical situation of her life—that, before the actual listening experience, there is a *stage* that concerns the pre-exposure context of the listener. This stage has several *dimensions*, a personal dimension of situated faith (Kathy) and a liturgical dimension of preparing for the sermon (Anny). 'Dimension' is also a theoretical code that connects various substantive concepts. Theoretical coding is thus interested in notions like dimensions and stages to integrate the concepts and properties into one integrated whole.

The first analytic procedure for theoretical coding is to sort the pile of memos, that is, to compare the concepts as developed in memos with each other while asking the question what the integrating category might be. Sorting is thus the final step towards abstraction; substantially because its focus is on relationships between concepts; methodically because its procedure is to compare abstract memos rather than concrete incidents of data (section 5.4.1).⁵⁹ Sorting leads to ideas concerning integration of concepts and properties. The next step therefore is to finalize the core variable that conceptualises the main concern of the listeners (section 5.4.2). Finally, the theory is written around this main concern. Writing is an essential step in theory formation since in writing chapters and sections, the various memos are integrated, less relevant properties and categories are temporarily dropped, and the final focus becomes as clear as possible (section 5.4.3).

5.4.1 Sorting memos for theoretical codes

Theoretical coding is an instance of the more general methodological procedures of comparing and coding; it differs though on the level of concreteness since memos and concepts are the 'data' to be compared and coded rather than concrete material from the interviews. The codes emerge from comparing memos and concepts rather than interview-bits. Further, the codes are no longer substantive but entail the theoretical indicators of the relationships between the memos. For example, when we compare the memo 'aboutness of the sermon' to the concept of 'entering the sermon' it appears that the aboutness of the sermon represents a separate *subprocess*, namely 'perceiving the sermon'. The process of perception is subsumed under entering the sermon, and in perceiving the sermon the listener attends to various illusionary areas of the sermon, the text, the gospel, and the world of lived-faith. Consequently, all memos that were written during

59. Constant comparison starts with comparing incidents of data (open coding), proceeds with comparing incidents of data with the emerging concepts (selective coding), and terminates in comparing concepts (theoretical coding). The level of abstraction thus increases with each type of comparison. See also table 4.5 on page 102.

the previous cycles of research and all concepts that have been generated, are compared and their relationships coded. This is called 'sorting' and it provides a final mechanism for integrating the theory into a parsimonious integrated whole. Integration is reached when all memos and concepts are related to the emerging core category.

First I collected all the data I needed for sorting. All memos (212) and concepts (155) were collected from Atlas.ti⁶⁰ and printed on small (A5) notes. I also printed bookreviews and booknotes from my bibliographic files, generated during the research, when I continued reading in homiletics, communication theory, and theology. A pile of envelopes was used to categorize all memos and notes that became related. As explained earlier (see page 96) I switched from using the computer to doing the analysis manually.⁶¹ I started with the two core variables that were formulated at the end of the previous cycle, 'entering the sermon' and 'redefining faith'. Then I took each next memo from the pile of printed memos to compare it to either entering or redefining and defined its relationship, placing it somewhere around the two central variables while noting the relationship between the memos and concepts in new memos putting them in between.⁶²

This procedure is both very intuitive and creative on the one hand, and analytic and consistent on the other. For example, starting with the memo 'From entering the sermon to rescripting faith' I compared the memos 'using the sermon' and 'sermon as faith-event'. In listening the hearer handles the sermon this way or another. In fact, studying this relationship it appeared that the listening experience consists of two elements: the sermon is used in a more functional way by the listener or the sermon is a space in which the listener experiences faith, salvation, or just enjoys being there. When I compared those memos, another substantial code emerged, namely 'the listening experience' with two dimensions (theoretical code): a liturgical-immediate and a situational-reflective dimension of the listening experience. These dimensions point towards the hearer's attitudes towards the listening experience.

Further, I related these dimensions to the memo that describes how in listening the listener moves from entering the world of the sermon towards a redefinition of faith. In doing so it became clear that the listening experience is one of three larger sub-processes that explain the variety in which listeners

60. The final interviews were done in 2005, sorting was done in spring 2006.

61. Atlas.ti has advanced functions for creating net-views, charting relationships between memos, concepts, and pieces of data yet it cannot pass the level of flexibility that is manually reached in shuffling memos, comparing, and taking new notes on a large flat surface (e.g. a table or floor).

62. For a more extended description and criteria for sorting, see Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 120–127. Cf. also Glaser, *Doing*, pp. 189–192.

become part of the preaching event.⁶³ Hence, this relatively simple methodical act of relating three memos generates the necessary theoretical relationships to integrate the various concepts. In doing so a whole network of concepts and memos emerged, namely 'the emergent theoretical outline or conceptual framework.'⁶⁴

In the next stage I put together memos and concepts into more theoretical categories in order to articulate the final central category; to leave out certain memos and concepts that did not relate to this category; and to conceptualise the relationships between the central variable and its conceptual neighbours. This procedure is properly called *theoretical coding* as it 'helps to decide on and figure out the relation of the concept to the core category'⁶⁵. During sorting the central category becomes more and more focussed and concepts that have been generated and developed in memos were left out for, 'though a fit occurs for every memo, if they are not of sufficient relevance and work, they can overload the theory's parsimony and scope.'⁶⁶ Take, for example, the concept 'listening competence' that indicated the competency listeners have to make sense of the sermon's language. Though it is grounded in the sense that it was developed during comparing bits of data, it appeared to be less relevant to articulate the various stages and dimensions.⁶⁷ Hence during sorting two questions were being asked: 1. does this memo or concept relate to the central category; and 2. what is its theoretical relationship to the central category?

5.4.2 The central category: getting religiously involved in hearing a sermon

Now it is time to integrate the concepts and memos into one conceptual whole while leaving out those concepts that do not account for most of the variety in the substantive area. So what does account for the variety? The following interconnected ideas emerged. First, entering the sermon has a before and beyond. Listeners open up *before* they actually engage in the sermon. When they actually start listening to the words of the preacher they engage in three processes: experience, perception and identification. These processes indicate how listeners dwell in the sermon for a while, hence I renamed 'entering the

63. For the memos see page 141. For the final framework of experiencing the sermon, see Chapter 7.

64. Holton, 'Coding', p. 283.

65. Glaser, *Theoretical Coding*, p. 37. Cf. also B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), p. 40.

66. Glaser, *Doing*, p. 190.

67. Thus the fact that this concept does not appear in the final theory does not imply that it is 'invalid' or 'wrong', just that it is of less use for the developing theory on getting religiously involved.

sermon' into *dwelling in the sermon*. These processes lead to an intrapersonal, mental⁶⁸ 'thing' that may be called 'actualisation of faith'. Although redefining faith still remains a valid concept, it does not sufficiently capture the fact that in listening faith springs into action so during sorting the concept was dropped and replaced by a more fitting one. It becomes lively, more real, more significant. Being in the sermon, perceiving what the sermon is about, identifying with parts of it result in a more conscious, a more actual experience of faith in God. So in comparing the various memos and concepts, three aspects of a larger whole appear: *opening up*, *dwelling in the sermon*, and *actualising faith*.

Is there a theoretical model that binds these three aspects together? What are they 'aspects of'? New comparisons come in. Take, for instance, the idea of 'a preparatory function of worship'. The worship service functions for listeners to prepare for the sermon that is coming up next.⁶⁹ The concept, however, fits the boundary between opening up and dwelling in the sermon. It is through the worship service that listeners start to inhabit the sermon. Another idea is important. Take, for instance, the memos on identification. Various memos describe two *ways of* identification: hearers identify with elements in the sermon that concern the religious personality of the preacher and they identify with aspects of the larger symbolic-narrative world of the sermon. Yet when they identify in terms of first or even third person terms: it's about me (or us), or it's about him, the listener's faith becomes actualised.⁷⁰

So here we have two 'bridging' ideas, worship and personalised identification, that suggest a model that consists of three phases or stages. This model finally answers the question what happens when listeners hear a sermon and it addresses the main concern that listeners are resolving when they hear a sermon, they are busy *getting religiously involved in the sermon*. When they cannot get religiously involved, the sermon is either bad or their own attitude is wrong.⁷¹ Either way, the whole event of listening did not answer the expectation and did not produce a kind of involvement that stands out compared to other communicative events like entertainment or education. How then does the larger idea of getting religiously involved relate to the three stages or phases? The answer is that it relates to the stages as a theoretical code that integrates the main concern of the listeners in terms of a basic socio-religious process.

68. While avoiding psychological language here I do not deny that these processes are thoroughly social-psychological but I wish to delay a reductive retreat into one of the social-scientific branches at the expense of the religious domain.

69. See further, section 6.2.

70. As we will see below in Chapter 10.1 things are a little more complex, perception and experience also play their roles.

71. About the relation between descriptives and normativity in empirical theology, see section 11.2.

5.4.3 Theoretical codes: a basic socio-religious process in three stages

The three stages of opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and actualising faith are part of a larger process. In general, a process moves along certain lines, it starts somewhere and ends somewhere with certain events in between. It may be circular in the sense that, in the end, it generates a new cycle that goes through all the stages again. The defining characteristic of a process, however, is that it consists of ‘two or more clear emergent stages’⁷². What about the three stages that ‘process out’ the event of listening? Though opening up and dwelling in the sermon are temporally distinct (there is a time span between the first part of the worship service and the actual sermon), the distinction between dwelling in the sermon and actualising faith can hardly be perceived. Stages, Glaser explains, ‘may be in vivo (generally perceivable by those persons involved), or purely heuristic (generally not perceivable by the persons involved, but demarcated by the sociologist for theoretical reasons), or some shade in between.’⁷³ These distinctions are helpful here, since the stage of actualising faith is heuristic while opening up and dwelling in the sermon are more in-vivo stages.

Therefore, the answer to the research question, what happens when listeners hear a sermon, is answered as follows: they get religiously involved in the sermon in three stages. First they open up to listen, during the preaching event they dwell in the sermon, and finally their faith is actualised. Each of these three stages contributes to the larger process. *Opening up* concerns the listener’s receptivity to get involved; when listeners *dwell in the sermon* a threefold involvement takes shape: the listening experience (experiential involvement), the perception of the sermon by the listener (attentive involvement), and existentially when the listeners identifies with elements in the sermon (existential involvement); in *actualising faith* involvement is particularly religiously specified: in listening faith in God is actualised according to two modes, an illuminative or momentary and an anamnestic or sequential mode, each having two dimensions: a dialectical orientation and a divine-human encounter. Though the theoretical code of ‘basic social process’ is only one of the many available codes to integrate a substantial theory, the model I present here is a typical one for a ‘basic social process’ dissertation, namely that a basic process ‘organizes the emerging theory in such a way that it had not been conceptualised—and thus ‘known’—before.’⁷⁴

The basic process of ‘getting religiously involved’ fits Grounded Theory’s methodological criteria for central categories. Let me consider three criteria: the category must frequently reoccur, it takes more time to saturate and is completely

72. Cf. Glaser’s definition of a basic social process, Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, p. 97.

73. Ibid., p. 98.

74. B. G. Glaser, *Grounded Theory. The Basic Social Process Dissertation*. (Mill Valley: Sociology Press, 1996), p. xiii.

variable.⁷⁵ Getting religiously involved reoccurs in the data all the time. Though involvement seemed too general at first, it is indeed a concept that captures most of the variety in the data. Listeners are involved in the sermon or they are not; they feel included or left out; they involve in the sermon or the sermon involves them. The concept is very strong to do justice to both active and passive aspects of listening⁷⁶, it is completely variable in types of involvement, conditions for involvement and degrees of involvement to name a few. In fact, to saturate getting religiously involved completely, it would take several substantive studies beyond preaching and listening and is a promising idea for a formal practical-theological theology.⁷⁷

I have argued that in the construction of practical-theological concepts the social and the religious are intertwined and irreducible. The dual intentionality that I have described earlier⁷⁸ has thus been explicitly articulated. In particular, the final stage of the process, actualising faith presents a religious phenomenon, but also the subprocesses of perception, identification and experiencing are religiously qualified. Dwelling in the sermon, the second stage, thus concerns a listener who identifies himself with the religious realities that are perceived in the sermon and who experiences the sermon as a phenomenal whole, a liturgical God-directed kind of experience at the very moment of listening. The Augustinian distinction between *uti* and *frui* is used to articulate this pattern in the data. Glaser's basic social process thus has a theological counterpart, the process of getting religiously involved in hearing a sermon counts as an example of a *basic socio-religious process*.⁷⁹

In conclusion, figure 5.5 graphically presents the empirical theological theory. It is conceptual, well-integrated, and parsimonious. It consists of both substantial concepts such as 'actualising faith' and 'third person listening' etc. as well as theoretical concepts like 'orientations', 'stages', and 'sequence'. The model diagrams the three stages of getting religiously involved in hearing a sermon, namely 'opening up', 'dwelling in the sermon', and 'actualising faith', all connected to various properties and dimensions. Finally, it presents a parsimonious model with only 12 categories.⁸⁰ In the next part of this study the various stages are described in more detail.

75. For all 11 criteria, see Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 95–96.

76. See section 2.4.3 on page 51.

77. See further section 11.4.

78. See section 4.4.

79. To complete the Glaserian nomenclature, besides BSP's (social structural processes) and BSP's (social-psychological processes) there are BSRP's (basic socio-religious processes). Cf. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, pp. 102–103.

80. 1st person plural engagement and experiencing common pleasure are properties of identifying with and experiencing the sermon respectively and do not constitute categories that stand on their own.

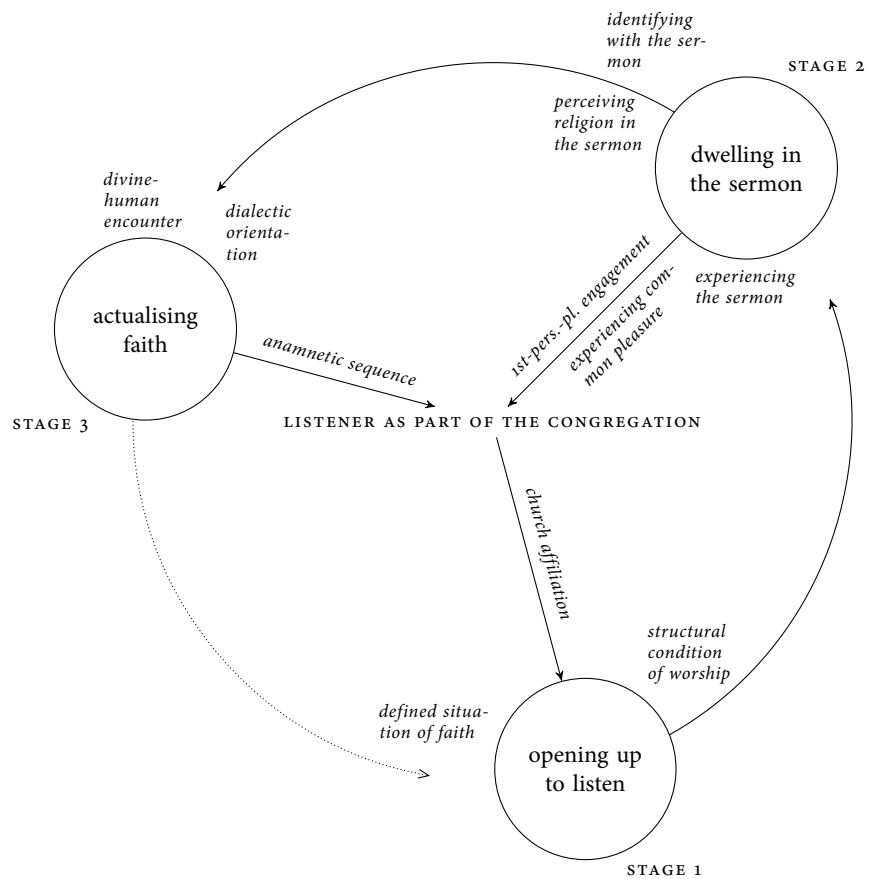


Figure 5.5 Theoretical coding, analytic framework:
GETTING RELIGIOUSLY INVOLVED IN HEARING SERMONS.

PART III

**A Grounded Theory on Getting
Religiously Involved in Hearing
Sermons**

6

OPENING UP TO LISTEN

6.1 THE LISTENER *BEFORE* LISTENING

I come to church more thirsty, I think that's it. The sermon has nothing to do with it, it's because of me, it's my attitude. (Anny)

Opening up is the first stage of getting religiously involved in hearing a sermon. It accounts for the listener's receptivity and conditions his readiness to listen. This chapter explains how receptivity on the part of the listener may be understood, what factors determine variation in opening up and how opening up relates to the actual exposure to the sermon. It varies subjectively (section 6.3), communally (section 6.4), and liturgically (section 6.2).

It has been calculated that about a third of the listeners prepare themselves for going to church. The majority of them mention prayer as a means to do so.¹ Opening up is thus a religious act on the part of the listeners in the sense that listeners invoke God when they prepare themselves for the service in general and for the sermon in particular.

You just have to keep going, sometimes you go praying that there would be only one word for me, one that helps me to go on this week. Something that strengthens me, you now. (Shana)

For some, opening up is part of a weekly recurring pattern of going to church. It is moving from one service towards another. They feel a sense of belonging to the believing congregation; going to church and hearing a sermon is part of their common practice of faith. Others feel a pressing need to enter a quiet space when facing the hardship of life, they look for an environment to reflect, to be encouraged, to receive strength for another difficult week. For some, it takes

1. See C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005), p. 253.

some effort to go to church. For them, opening up to hear a sermon is not part and parcel of the life of faith nor do they feel pressed by the everyday situation of life; they lack a clear urge and a feeling of belonging. Yet they are present; though one listener confesses:

I don't need church to believe. I feel that I can believe without going to church. Church is not the primary thing; it supports me. And from time to time it remains difficult to taking that step again. For me it's like crossing a threshold. [...] Something in myself that I need to overcome. You keep coming back, taking that step again.
(Jonathan)

Scattered remarks in various publications emphasize the fact that in homiletics 'opening up' has not been explicitly thematised as object of research. In audience studies, researchers distinguish between audiences in relation to the pre-exposure, exposure and the post-exposure context.² The audience exists in three different dimensions of time and place in relation to the actual communicative event: before the event, during the event, and after the event. If we transpose these distinctions into a taxonomy of preaching audiences, it turns out that most of the relevant literature studies the audience from the perspective of the exposure or post-exposure context. Attention³ (during listening) and retention (after listening) are the main themes of reception studies. These issues relate to the post-exposure (how much are listeners able to reproduce) or exposure (how do listeners experience the presence of the preacher, how does their attention-span fluctuate, did they perceive the 'correct' speech acts) context respectively. Listeners are being studied from the point of view of how they perceive and interpret the sermon, and of how background variables, such as age, psychological characteristics, educational level etc., influence this hermeneutical practice. Others are predominantly interested in how these same variables account for how listeners recall sermons or engage with topics in the sermon afterwards, how the sermon has influenced their attitudes or whether and how impact of preaching can be measured. Opening up, however, concerns the pre-exposure context of listeners. It stages the listeners *before* they dwell in the sermon.

Usually, the pre-exposure context comes in when homileticians acknowledge that the preaching audience is exceptionally diverse. People of all ages, in all sorts of socio-economic conditions, with all kinds of social and psychological traits, from a diversity of backgrounds and living very different lives, come together to worship and listen. Guido Schüepp enumerates various factors that

2. See D. McQuail, *Audience Analysis*. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 59–62 and M. R. Levy and S. Windahl, 'The Concept of Audience Activity' in: K. E. Rosengren, L. A. Wenner and P. Palmgreen, editors, *Media Gratifications Research. Current Perspectives*. (London: Sage Publications, 1985), pp. 112–119.

3. See for instance the recent German study, H. Schwier and S. Gall, *Predigt Hören. Befunde und Ergebnisse der Heidelberger Umfrage zur Predigtrezeption*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

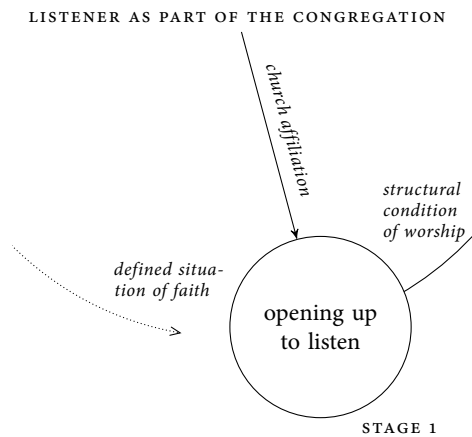


Figure 6.1 Opening up to listen

influence the preaching event from the perspective of listeners: (i) physical factors, like acoustics, perception-psychology and the physical-aesthetic form of communication; (ii) the listener's frame of mind, such as everyday life conditions (*Alltagsbedingt*) and the listener's mood; (iii) intellectual understanding; (iv) upbringing and educational aspects, including the social-cultural world of the listener, mentality and world-view, religious tradition and spirit of the age; (v) stages of development in life; (vi) experiences in life distinguished according to personal experience, experience of faith (such as doubt and the inability to believe), and religious experiences (like questioning, searching, hoping, forgiving etc.); (vii) impressions of the 'soul' and psycho-analytic structures; (viii) social relationships, such as the relationship between a preacher and the audience, the field of relations in which the listener operates; (ix) values, choices and aims; (x) readiness to believe.⁴

This chapter deals with the listener in the pre-exposure context. In the pre-exposure context the 'receptivity' of the listener stands out. Three aspects of receptivity play a role during the stage of opening up: subjective receptivity (the subjectively defined situation of faith by the listener, section 6.3), communal receptivity (the affiliation of the listener with the church, section 6.4), and liturgical receptivity (the function of the worship service in relation to the sermon, section 6.2). Figure 6.1 shows how opening up for the sermonic event varies in

4. G. Schüepf, 'Struktur und Faktoren der Predigtkommunikation'. in: G. Schüepf, editor, *Handbuch zur Predigt*. (Zürich: Benzinger, 1982), pp. 50–76. See also C. Bunnens, 'Die Hörer'. in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlag, 1990), pp. 159–165.

terms of worship, in terms of the hearer's individual definition of faith, and in terms of his communal awareness.

6.2 RECEPTIVITY AND THE LITURGICAL STRUCTURE

Opening up does not have a clearly demarcated starting point but it ends rather abruptly though not unanticipated. Abruptly, because the sermon starts anyway; even if opening up does not always result in a receptive attitude from the perspective of the listener. Anticipated, because the transition to the next stage—dwelling in the sermon⁵—is liturgically structured when listeners see the sermon coming. The liturgical order thus functions as a structural condition in moving from the first stage of opening up to the second stage of dwelling in the sermon. This takes place rather autonomously since at some point in the service the preacher starts preaching whether the listener is ready for it or not. Further, since this is anticipated by the listener, the broader question dealt with in this section is how the liturgy relates to the sermon from the perspective of the listener. From the analysis of the data, two aspects emerge as relevant here: the liturgy appears to function both in a *preparatory* and a *dramatic* way.

6.2.1 The structural condition of the liturgical order

The Anglican pastor of a nowadays charismatic congregation in Asia smiled when I asked him about the liturgy in their services. 'We don't have a liturgy,' he replied, 'our service is led by the Spirit.' Yet even the 'lowest' approach to liturgy reveals order and sequence as I discovered when I visited this service 'without liturgy'. Indeed, no traditional hymns and prayer books, yet a professionally staged and thoroughly performed high-tech service.⁶ Every church service follows a certain order or sequence and this sequence has dramatic, preparatory and structural aspects when it comes to opening up for hearing a sermon.

In empirical homiletics the relationship between listening, liturgy and sermon has not been a topic for research with the exception of the German study 'congregations experience their services'.⁷ Researchers compare four services based upon different liturgical traditions and inquire how the liturgical sequence facilitates the reception of the sermon. These traditions have been selected for their theological structure, the movement between God and humans. In all four congregations the same preacher preaches the very same sermon. The

5. See Chapter 7.

6. See R. Brouwer and T. T. J. Pleizier, 'Vitale gemeenten van nieuwe christenen. Globale impressies vanuit New York en Singapore.' *Kerk en Theologie*, 56 (2005):3, pp. 235–237.

7. K.-F. Daiber et al., *Gemeinden erleben ihre Gottesdienste. Erfahrungsberichte*. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1978).

researchers have tried to find correlations between the theological shape of the liturgy on the one hand and how participants in the liturgy experienced the sermon and the service as a whole on the other hand. The conclusion seems rather disappointing: the shape of the liturgy barely influences the perception of the speech acts in the sermon by the listeners.⁸ Neither does a specific liturgical tradition have any measurable impact on the reception of the sermon.

Nonetheless, homileticians emphasize the relation between liturgy and preaching. Empirically however, it has only been confirmed that the relationship between the reception of the sermon by the listeners, the level of retention and the ability to reconstruct the content of the sermon on the one hand and the participation in the liturgy on the other hand, do not correlate significantly. Further, in other empirical studies the liturgy only functions as 'context' of the sermon.⁹ Its relevance in the process of listening has not been empirically settled.¹⁰ Yet from the interviews in this study a relevant relationship between liturgy and preaching emerges.

The liturgy structures the moment of listening. The sermon is preceded by various liturgical acts and takes place at a fixed moment during the service that regular church members are able to anticipate. Positively, the movement within the liturgy towards the sermon is structured by a pattern of actions and practices and helps the listener to move along to prepare for the sermon. The liturgical sequence does not only have preparatory and dramatic aspects¹¹, but also provides the listener with a structure that transcends his situation and moves along even if the listener is not able to tune in or to participate. The liturgy simultaneously enables listeners to move into the preaching event as well as 'forces' him to listening whether he is ready or not. In other words, the liturgy puts the audience in the position to listen. Opening up has a structure that is not controlled by the individual listener but is part of how the community of

8. Daiber et al., *Gemeinden erleben*, pp. 98–101, 113–115.

9. See for instance Stark, *Proeven van de preek*, pp. 204–205, 218, 253–255. Also K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören. Band II. Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hörern. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*. (München: Kaiser, 1982), *Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung*. The recent American study of sermon reception leaves out the issue of worship. The liturgy is neither mentioned in the list of topics for the interviews, nor becomes a theme in the analysis of the data. See for the topic list, J. S. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners. Homiletical Case Studies*. Volume 1, Channels of Listening. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), pp. 181–182.

10. For the importance of the relationship between liturgy and preaching in general, see for instance K.-H. Bieritz, 'Die Predigt im Gottesdienst'. in: P. C. Bloth, editor, *Handbuch der praktische Theologie. Praxisfeld: Gemeinden*. Volume 3, (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1987), H. W. Dannowski, *Kompendium der Predigtlehre*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985), pp. 79–84. Cf. also Greenshaw, D. and Allen, R. J., editors, *Preaching in the Context of Worship*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

11. See further below section 6.2.2. See also section 7.4 on listening as liturgical act.

faith structures its worship.¹²

In order to work like this, the sequence of worship provides the listener with structural elements or markings that indicate the movement towards the sermon. Take for instance the moment that the children are invited to the Sunday school meeting in one of the rooms outside the liturgical space. The children leave for Sunday school and then the sermon starts. This is a clear marking for the listener that the sermon is coming up next. As one listener says: 'Then it's for me like, well, the children have gone; I can sit back, here I have come for.' The invitation to the children is heard as a call to be ready to listen. The liturgical sequence itself contains moments that mark the movement towards the sermon: children leaving the sanctuary, a minister ascending into the pulpit, the reading of the lectionary, or the prayer of illumination.¹³ The liturgy thus provides listeners with a structural condition in the process of opening up to listen and the actual listening experience. The movement towards the sermon is not in the hands of the individual listener, but is structurally facilitated in the liturgical order. This structural feature of the liturgical sequence helps listeners to open up and become ready to listen freely from their own situation and regardless the theological orientation that informs the liturgical tradition.

To this effect, the liturgical sequence is characterised by two additional properties. First, the listener anticipates the liturgical transition to the sermon. The liturgical order is structurally 'interrupted' and moves to the sermon, a movement that is clearly marked within the liturgical order. The woman in the example above knows that when the children are leaving the church, the preaching event approaches and she installs herself to listening to the sermon. The various elements in the liturgy are ordered in a fixed pattern which reoccurs every week and makes the listener aware of structural markings indicating the movement towards the sermon. This is specific for the Protestant service of worship, for without exception, the listeners agree that the sermon is the climax of the service, or negatively, that without sermon there would not be a proper service. This anticipatory liturgical structure provides a dramatic whole in which the various elements are ordered in a narrative of salvation and which functions preparatory for hearing the sermon.

Second, within the liturgy the individual listener does not have any means to influence this structural ordering. The movement to the sermon lies beyond the control of the individual listener. When she talks about the difference of reading Scripture at home and listening to the sermon in church, one listener remarks

12. See further section 6.4.

13. H. O. Old, *Leading in Prayer. A Workbook for Worship*. (Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 139–146; also P. Oskamp, 'Gebeden en gaven'. in: *De weg van de liturgie. Tradities, achtergronden, praktijk* (Meinema, 1998), pp. 221–222.

I've got a lack of patience in my character. So when I am at home, I am reminded of doing the laundry, or that I should call my mother. In church there is no way out. So what does one do? One starts listening. (Elly)

The liturgical transition exerts some kind of autonomous 'power' regardless the audience. Paradoxically this is also something listeners expect due to the fact that it helps them to anticipate when the sermon is coming up.¹⁴

6.2.2 Worship: preparatory movement and dramatic flow

The structuring aspect of the liturgical sequence raises the question whether the liturgy is predominantly preparatory for the preaching event. How does this work out in different congregations and different styles of worship? Similar to other mainline and national denominations, worship in the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands is characterised by a pluriformity of liturgical traditions. This study exemplifies this pluriformity since both traditional and contemporary styles of worship are present in the sample of respondents.¹⁵

Initially, I shared with the literature the assumption that the liturgy provides the *context* for preaching.¹⁶ Hence in the first sample of interviews I included a question on the worship experience in order to collect data on the context of preaching.¹⁷ The question: 'how did you experience the service as a whole?' generated various answers, not only substantially, but also in terms of style and discourse. Substantially, listeners reported different experiences, like a certain hymn that made them think of a particular period in their lives. One listener told how badly she was seated which ruined her worship experience; someone else explained how singing in the church choir made him feel contributing to the service in a meaningful way. Others told how the selection of hymns helped them to understand and recall the sermon. Some contrasted their state of mind with the mood of the music when entering the church building, others found themselves at home though the guests who turned up for the Christening ceremony caused the local worshipper some uneasiness—"it was so crowded with

14. Some listeners express their frustration about the fact that more flexibility in the liturgical structure is so hard to attain. It represents the other side of the coin of the structural conditions generated by the liturgical sequence: liturgy can be experienced as inflexible.

15. Since the meaning of worship is not the substantive area of this study I leave further discussion. For an empirical ethnographic study of the meaning of worship, see M. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship. The ethnography of worship in four Christian congregations in Manchester*. (Birmingham: University Press, 1999). For a semiotical approach, see D. G. Hughes, *Worship as Meaning. A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2003).

16. Cf. Greenshaw and Allen, *Preaching in the Context of Worship*; W. Skudlarek, *The Word in Worship: Preaching in a Liturgical Context*. (Abingdon, 1981).

17. See appendix A for the initial interview design.

all these strange folks". Worship is about meeting God, experiencing fellowship, and coming to rest.

Respondents employ *spatial* language in how they talk about the liturgy in relation to the sermon. The liturgy has a certain atmosphere, worship takes place in a climate of joy or deep gravity. Some suspect the pastor of intentionally bringing them in a certain mood by the choice of hymns and the selection of songs from the psalter. The service is a movement of which the sermon is only one element among others. Worship provides an environment to settle down and represents a place to repose from a week's load of work and worry. To be in church is to stay in a quiet space to listen to the explanation of Scripture in the sermon, to sit down and let the sermon enter one's mind. The spatial language underscores that the liturgy is not a mere 'context' in which preaching takes place, but that it fosters a movement that either leads up to the sermon as apex of the liturgy or in which the sermon is just one element among other religious practices, such as singing, confession and communion. Liturgy, so Manfred Josuttis notes, structures an acting-space in which 'the divine atmospheres may enfold their life-giving power.'¹⁸

The spatial notions that respondents employ in their narratives on the worship service have two specific aspects. Worship creates a *preparatory movement* in relation to the sermon and it is part of a larger *dramatic flow* of the broader liturgy of the church and the church calendar. The preparatory movement and dramatic flow of worship from the perspective of opening up for hearing a sermon, deserves more attention. Hence the connection between worship and preaching is twofold: in relation to the sermon, the liturgy is a *preparatory movement* and the sequence of worship constitutes a *dramatic flow*. Hearers talk about the liturgy as a movement with the sermon as its climax. So worship does not merely surround the sermon as the context in which preaching takes place; it leads up to the sermon. The singing and the prayers, the call for worship and other elements that precede the sermon in the liturgical order help to prepare the hearer to receive the sermon as Word of God. So worship prepares the listener to listen to the sermon.

Further, the spatial language in the interview discourse makes clear that the liturgical sequence builds a dramatic flow. The liturgy as environment is a *Gestalt*, a whole. The respondent does not talk about a priority between the sermon and other elements in the liturgy, but speaks about the space of worship as one movement in which the singing, the praying and the preaching are tied together into one experience. Some respondents are having difficulty looking back at the

18. M. Josuttis, *Der Weg in das Leben. Eine Einführung in den Gottesdienst auf verhaltenswissenschaftlicher Grundlage*. (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1993), p. 236. Cf. also W. J. Bittner, *Hören in der Stille. Praxis meditativer Gottesdienste*. (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

service as consisting of a diversity of elements. They do not differentiate between the sermon or the service when they tell about a capturing idea they appropriated or the moment of enlightenment that took place at some point in the service. The service has been experienced as one dramatic whole.

This analytic distinction between preparatory movement and dramatic flow is confirmed by a second characteristic of the interview discourse. There is some *vagueness* in how listeners distinguish between the worship service as a whole and the sermon in particular. When asked about the sermon, some hesitate and wonder whether something was mentioned in one of the prayers or in the songs. In the memory of the hearers, the boundaries between liturgy and the sermon become rather opaque. In their experience service and sermon together create a whole in which the various elements seem inseparable, as some incidents in the interviews reveal. The difference between the sermon and other parts of the liturgy may become so vague that “there might not have been a sermon at all”, as one woman said. Others have a clear distinction between sermon and liturgy yet trivialise the liturgical experience. One woman seemed quite surprised when I asked about her worship experience. “The service?”, she replied, “well, not very particular, just business as usual.” And that was it. The worship service was not something to talk about as specifically relevant for her. She might have been expecting a question on the sermon, but her reaction seemed typical: her answer indicated that the service as a whole did not have a lasting impression on her. It seemed more like the usual preparation for what really mattered: the sermon. In other words, the way respondents reflect on the worship service gives an impression either of the dramatic whole in which the sermon is embedded as one element among many other meaningful elements or of a preparatory environment that is important—as a backdrop, to get ready for the sermon.

The preparatory and dramatic aspects of the liturgical experience, however, should not be played off against each other. The preparatory reconstruction of the liturgical experience has a religious quality. One listener reports how the liturgy is preparatory for opening up to hear God’s Word. She intuitively borrows language that comes from the Eucharistic prayer, the notion of the *sursum corda*, the lifting up of the heart towards God in order to cultivate a receptive attitude:¹⁹

It (the liturgy) is about fixing oneself upon God. Because one is very much into ‘the world’ so to say. Of course one remains part of this world, but one is still in a here-and-now rhythm. I guess it’s right to sing together as a community, and that it is a natural transition to the sermon. To direct oneself towards God. To lift up one’s heart to God, you know. Lift up your hearts, something like that. I don’t know exactly, but that feeling comes with it. (Caroline)

19. For the development and meaning of the eucharistic prayer in the Reformed tradition, see R. P. Byars, *Lift Your Hearts on High. Eucharistic Prayer in the Reformed Tradition*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

For this listener, the preparatory function of the liturgy has both communal and religious significance. The lifting up of the heart binds together and moves the congregation as a community towards a shared attitude to receive the Word of God. As in the pre-reformation period the sermon was meant to prepare the hearts and minds of the participants to receive the Eucharistic elements, the liturgical space provides a passage to the sermon. The structural condition I introduced in the previous section is experienced by these listeners in such a way that it closes the stage of opening up. The aspect of preparation underlines this. Eventually, this rendering of liturgy and preaching underscores the priority of the sermon and shows that the sermon is an element in the liturgical sequence that one needs preparation for. ‘Cultic behaviour changes people and they are opened up in the introductory part of the worship service’ as Josuttis already observed in a phenomenological style.²⁰

According to the dramatic experience of worship, the liturgy is a whole rather than consisting of separate components. It represents a more phenomenological rendering of the liturgical experience. Some listeners locate this dramatic aspect of worship and preaching in the temporal context of the liturgical year. Take for instance the next listener who talks about a service within the Easter-cycle:

A song like this [he mentions a particular hymn] gives one the feeling, look, we are on a journey to Pentecost and that is what we have to scrutinize. I mean, He has revealed that He is not just a human being [...] He has added something special to it. [...] And the whole sermon, the whole service breathed that spirit.
(Ronald)

The lectionary is not just the agenda for the minister to be used for the planning of worship but it predisposes the congregation to become part of the journey through the readings and themes ahead. The sermon is experienced as a component of a larger dramatic whole that is re-enacted in the liturgy. This does not necessarily imply that the liturgy creates a religious realm untouched by the hardship and realities of faith as it is lived. The listener above explicitly relates the dramatical enactedment in the liturgy to his own life. “We have to test ourselves against this journey”, he explains.

The relationship between liturgy and sermon is experienced as belonging to the same sequence, the same flow of representing the story of the gospel, from Christmas to Pentecost, in the here and now. The service as a whole contributes to this one dramatic movement, a movement that is clearly much broader in scope than this particular service but it encloses the liturgical year in which the Christ-event is re-enacted liturgically.²¹

20. Josuttis, *Der Weg in das Leben*, p. 237.

21. On worship as drama of salvation in traditional Protestant worship, see also M. Horton, *A Better Way. Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship*. (Baker Books, 2003), pp. 141–162.

6.3 RECEPTIVITY AND THE LISTENER'S DEFINED SITUATION OF FAITH

In opening up the listener becomes receptive to the sermon. The liturgical sequence takes along the listener into the communal movement of worship, both in its preparatory and dramatic qualities. The listener's receptivity, his readiness to listen, is a property of the audience rather than of the liturgical sequence—though both aspects clearly interact in the course of participating in worship. Therefore, the next aspects of opening up concern the listener's situation in life and how he relates to the worshipping community. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to explore these individual and communal dimensions of audience receptivity.²² The chapter closes with indicating how both aspects of receptivity work together in opening up by presenting some examples from the respondents in this study.

First, then, how do listeners define their situation of the life of faith and how does this situated receptivity conditions opening up? Since Ernst Lange inaugurated the turn to the listener in German homiletics, the idea of the 'homiletic situation' captured the imagination of homileticians.²³ Preaching and listening are situated acts. The situation of preaching consists of larger cultural conditions in which preaching takes place and a theological evaluation of the human condition, such as Lange has put it as a 'situation of contestation', the hardship of life in the face of God's judgment and grace. Manuals on sermon preparation urged preachers to reflect upon the situation of the listener accordingly. Yet the preacher's rather than the listener's reconstruction of the situation predominates homiletic reflection. Preachers are the ones to move between 'text and situation'²⁴. On the other hand, the empirical listener or 'wirkliche Hörer' also defines his own situation.

The notion 'definition of the situation' is a socio-psychological notion that is coined by symbolic interactionists such as G.H. Mead and H. Blumer. 'We *define* the situation "as it exists" out there and that definition is highly influenced by our social life.'²⁵ In a symbolic interactionist action framework humans define their situations in order to take decisions and act accordingly. The definition of the situation is 'the sum of all recognized information, from the point-of-view of the

22. The emergence of 'receptivity' in the study took place during selective coding, see section 5.3 for the various methodical steps that shaped the concept of receptivity.

23. See J. Hermelink, *Die homiletische Situation. Zur jüngeren Geschichte eines Predigtproblems*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

24. See two, rather arbitrary, examples: R. Zerfass, *Grundkurs Predigt. Textpredigt*. (1987) edition. (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 2002), pp. 76–85 and J. R. Stott, *Between Two Worlds. The Challenge of Preaching Today*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 135–179.

25. J. M. Charon, *Symbolic Interactionism. An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration*. 7th edition. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 42.

actor, which is relevant to locating self and others, so that [he or she] can engage in self-determined lines of action and interaction.²⁶ Similarly, communication studies uses this symbolic interactionist notion to explain why and how people use the media, its sources and its messages. Renckstorf, McQuail and Jankowski for instance, developed a theoretical perspective on audience research stressing that

media users are active individuals who interpret media messages on the basis of their own objectives, values and plans, and then carefully construct their (external) actions.²⁷

Media users construct meaning in perceiving, thematizing and diagnosing their every day life situation. These socially constructed meanings determine the framework in which they use the media.²⁸

In hearing a sermon listeners come with different perceptions and understandings of their individual situation of lived faith. They define their faith in terms of a very privately understood relationship with God or as part of the wider context of God's interaction with the world and human history. In listening their personal salvation is at stake as well as their coping with contextual issues, problems such as poverty and suffering, and they try to resolve the issues that bother them in their everyday lives. Their definition of faith, however, functions for most in the phase *before* listening. It accounts for the hearer's expectations regarding the preaching event and their values of appropriate preaching. Their definition of faith is embedded in the persons they are. At a deeper level than personality, social position, gender or upbringing, their definition of faith—though most likely shaped by factors as various different studies amply demonstrate—determines their situated receptivity to hear the sermon.

In the following two sections I will examine the way in which listeners define their situation in the stage of opening up. First, I will deal with the impact critical moments and the trivialities of life have on the definition of the situation of lived faith and the listener's receptivity (section 6.3.1). Next, I will demonstrate that the explicitness of the faith-relationship determines the receptivity of the audience (section 6.3.2).

26. Donald Ball (1972), cited in Charon, *Symbolic Interactionism*, p. 131.

27. Renckstorf, K., McQuail, D. and Jankowski, N., editors, *Media Use as Social Action. A European Approach to Audience Studies*. (London: John Libbey, 1996), p. 27. For a critical review of the idea of audience activity in communication studies, see F. A. Biocca, 'Opposing Conceptions of the Audience. The Active and Passive Hemispheres of Mass Communication Theory'. *Communication Yearbook. An Annual Review*, 1 (1988):11. Also above, section 2.4.3.

28. See further, T. R. Lindlof and B. C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. 2nd edition. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 41–44 and S. W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*. 7th edition. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), pp. 144–162.

6.3.1 Between critical moments and the trivialities of life

Steadfast believers, doubters, confused and sceptics: all kinds of people with different religious mindsets and attitudes occupy the pews. They come with explicit needs, in search for answers to burning questions or comfort in a situation of distress. They come with unclear visions and unbalanced lives, eager to receive clarity and stability. Their questions are highly specialized religious questions, intelligible for those inside the community of faith and framed by a particular religious socialisation or they reflect very much the questions they encounter in their everyday lives. At work they face charged rebuttals of their faith and are puzzled by issues like suffering, injustice and the high moral standards of 'unbelievers'. But they all come from a prior situatedness, a situation in which their faith in God and everyday life circumstances are intertwined. Indeed,

Faith receives its shape in this life. It is involved in everyday existence, with its joys and cares, its challenges and conflicts, and with the miseries and passions that are often part of it. Faith is lived: it accompanies us in our daily lives and is part of our journey through life.²⁹

This is particularly true for the preaching audience in the stage of opening up. Some feel tempted to leave behind their everyday situation in the wardrobe at the church entrance, partly because they want to in order to focus on the sermon, partly because they think they have to. They might even feel guilty when they find themselves unable to do so. Others have different ideas about bringing in their daily lives and they expect the preacher to help them make sense of their situatedness. Either way, faith and life interconnect when opening up to listen to the sermon.

In defining their own situation of faith hearers point to the significance of their current religious situation. On the one end of this significant range listeners find themselves in a critical moment in their lives. Kathy for instance. Her husband, a very committed Christian and held in great esteem in the congregation, recently left her after going through a severe crisis in their marriage. If someone is entitled to define her situation as critical, Kathy is. She tells that, in the first weeks after her husband left her, she went to church being very disturbed. 'Last Sunday', she tells me during the interview, 'was the first time I didn't cry', and she continues:

On the one hand, one feels something like: I do not want to sit here! And everyone says: keep coming, please! [...] Look, one's looking for something to hold on. Sure, one does not want to let loose, you know. Because a lot is on my

29. F. G. Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 43–44.

mind. [After the crisis] we prayed a lot, for all kinds of things. But now one asks: how could this happen? (Kathy)

The criticalness of the moment does not only consist of the hardship in life that is brought in into the service, but it also involves Kathy's faith-relationship. She wonders how her situation impacts her relationship with God and the longing for grip and the anxiousness to let go is very much religiously defined. Becoming receptive in the midst of a critical moment turns the stage of opening up into a tense experience in which the life of faith is at stake.

On the other end of the range of attributing significance to the situation of lived-faith we find the trivialities of life. The listener enters the sanctuary from a sense of normality; going to church is something like 'business as usual'. One does not do justice to his private definition of faith-as-it-is-lived in the here and now if one describes his situation as a critical one. Life goes on and how listeners situate their faith in life may have some plainness. This plainness, however, does not imply indifference, but rather indicates that the audience does not only consist of very disturbed people. Opening up to listen from a more trivial situatedness, however, does not put a listener in a very strong state of receptiveness. Caroline's observation sounds exemplary:

Like last Sunday. The whole week had been very stressfull. Very busy. Even that morning, we had visitors after the service, and in the afternoon as well. In the evening we had a prayer meeting at our place. So, yes, we had a very tight schedule. Well, late afternoon you rush to church. It just fits in between. You know, your thoughts spin around all those things that you have to do, the schedule for the week ahead; so completely, let's say, earth-centered. (Caroline)

The listener mentioned is caught up with mundane issues such as a rather tight schedule. Church barely fits in. Her private definition of lived-faith is not particularly critically determined but reflects how things usually are. Or, as another listener mentions in the midst of some reflections on what the sermon meant to her: 'Well, it is just that you engage yourself in it [faith], that you involve him [God] in your life.' Life goes on. Not every experience is as far-reaching than others. Faith is always situated albeit within the trivialities of everyday life. Situating one's faith-as-it-is-lived personalises opening up.

With Ernst Lange we might be inclined to say listeners find themselves in a situation that is religiously determined as a situation of 'temptation' (*Anfechtung*).³⁰ Their receptivity develops as it interacts with the critical moments in the life of faith. Yet, on the other end of the range we find a kind of receptivity that

30. See Hermelink, *Homiletische Situation*, pp. 156–222. A congenial yet critical review of Lange's position can be found in J. van der Laan, *Ernst Lange en de prediking. Een inleiding in zijn homiletische theorie*. (Kampen: Kok, 1989).

is less articulated and rather vague. Life is not only defined as temptation but sometimes—perhaps even more usual—it just comes as it is. The listener believes within the midst of trivialities like work and family, the ongoing flow of everyday life. The strength of Lange's conception according to Van der Laan is that Lange defines the homiletic situation in theological categories; its weakness lies in the fact that he does not differentiate within the theological notion of 'temptation'.³¹ Van der Laan argues for broadening of understanding the homiletic situation though he remains in the paradigm of a sender-centred or preacher-centred approach to preaching. The perspective of the audience however gives ample space to broaden the notion of situated faith since listeners define their life of faith on a range between critical moments and the trivialities of life.

A situated receptivity that is rather critical for the listener personalises opening up more than a trivial situation does. In critical moments—though moments include both longer periods of intense grief as well as brief moments of extreme joy—the listener is more likely to have personalised expectations from a sermon albeit unconscious. The grieving listener goes to church to find comfort in a specific, personal situation. The questioned hearer tries to find answers to a burning question. The depressed listener is looking for his own themes in the sermon.³² The expectations of listeners in a trivial situation are less personalised; that is to say they are more likely to be open for themes preachers address because their expectations are more diffuse and less specific.

6.3.2 The conscious or implicit faith-relationship

Another aspect of situated receptivity, however, emerges from the conversations with listeners. In the interview discourse it becomes apparent that some listeners clearly refer to God, Christ and salvation while others are much more hesitant to do so and remain rather opaque in defining the faith-relationship.

Some listeners are very much aware of their position in relation to God. They feel accepted as child of God; they are touched by something in the sermon that they relate to what God is doing, or their trust in God is sustained. This explicit awareness shows how they situate their faith and points to a further aspect of receptivity:

Well, because in listening to a sermon, very often it is expressed that you have to put your trust in God in all circumstances of your life, that he is with you, whatever happens. Yes, that is very encouraging to me. (Elly)

31. van der Laan, *Ernst Lange en de prediking*, pp. 308–315.

32. Cf. also H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 249–268.

Others question their assurance of faith, but are also very much explicitly aware of their relationship with God, though in their case this relationship is a quite disturbed relationship. In both cases, however, receptivity is characterised by an explicit awareness of the faith-relationship with God. Take, for instance, Shana. She finds herself at a very critical moment in her life having suddenly lost her husband only a few months ago. She also experiences her relationship with God as rather problematic. She explicitly stresses that before her husband died she already problematized the nature of her relationship with God. But the situation she finds herself in now, however, has strengthened this uncertainty whether God's benevolence extends to her; the personal appropriation of salvation has become more urgent since death entered her situation:

Me and Christ. Yes, and sometimes you doubt it. You doubt whether you are sure, I have that very much, yes [...] Well, before [my husband's death] I had it too, from time to time, but now, yes, it has become a more intense issue.

(Shana)

Other listeners, however, have a rather opaque understanding of their faith as it concerns the relationship with God. Faith to them is a world view that enables them to engage in the multiple aspects of life. They talk about faith in relation to the less explicit religious domains of life such as animal rights and the political controversies of the day. In church they hope to find answers to burning questions, to hear the preacher's opinion on current issues or to be challenged by an inspiring message. The most important thing on their mind is not the reality of the divine-human relationship. Faith as communion with God thus remains a rather opaque reality to them. It does not seem to be their prime interest in opening up. One of the listeners in this study, for instance, describes himself as a private believer who would never stand up for his faith in a more public situation and who is very happy with the anonymity in a larger gathering of worshippers. The sermon is a means for meditation³³ he says, and during the interview he does not express his faith more fully while keeping a rather formal attitude when it comes to hearing sermons. He talks about the length, the depths and clarity of sermons without entering a more religious kind of discourse; not even when invited during the interview. The faith-relationship remains rather implicit.

Faith denotes a relationship. In faith human beings relate to God. They carry along a set of convictions concerning God and somehow it entails trust. As Immink argues, faith denotes some kind of 'otherness'; the human mind—in its cognitive and affective functioning—has an intention towards God's Word and promises.³⁴ The structure of faith is such that it reaches out towards a divine

33. See further on the sermon as meditative environment, section 7.2.

34. See Immink, *Faith*, pp. 21–39, 240–247.

reality and it includes rather bold claims concerning the existence and active presence of God. Empirically, though the faith-relationship is not as clear-cut as it is supposed to be according to its ontology. The awareness of the faith-relationship among listeners varies between a very explicit awareness and a more latent, opaque one.

The listener is very conscious of his faith-relationship with God or this relationship is rather implicit for him. The dimension of receptivity suggests a range of values in between. Interestingly, though not supported by the material of this study, is the question whether there are also listeners who lack the faith-relationship at all. Then the range may be from conscious to non-existing with implicitness in between. Though speculative at this point because of the lack of incidents in the material, this idea helps to think about the formation of faith in a secularised society and with a specific evangelistic goal of preaching. It is indeed possible that listeners enter the sermon without any commitment to God's promises or any faith in Christ.

6.4 COMMUNAL RECEPTIVITY: THE LISTENER'S AFFILIATION WITH THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Opening up has liturgical and situational components. Yet there is also a communal aspect. The listener is affiliated to the preaching event as something that takes place in an institutional setting within the community of believers. Only guests who visit the church for the first time by their own initiative rather than by being invited probably lack this component of receptivity.

The sermon is an institutional reality. How listeners relate to the socio-religious institution of preaching largely depends upon the listener's affiliation with the congregation. Compared to the subjective situation of faith as it is lived, congregational affiliation represents an objective or an external aspect of receptivity. It is not so much connected with the inner mental life or private situation but it concerns a reality existing outside the listener and being much larger than his own personal life though affiliation is clearly a characteristic of this individual listener. Sometimes a clear tension may be felt between the objective aspect of affiliation and the subjective component of situated faith, which is expressed in the following incident. As individual the hearer is anonymously present at an event that builds a specific commonality:

On the one hand, I would say, you are together [in a service of worship] but in some way rather anonymous. To say it like this may miss the point, however, of experience in church. You are having a kind of common experience. That's hard to express. But I experience a kind of anonymity and that's fine. Fine anonymity. Yet you are doing it together. The common feeling is that you are doing the same thing, you listen to a sermon, you sing the psalms together. There is a

feeling of security, perhaps. You are in here together. The anonymity is perhaps that you are having your own spot, something comes up, and you don't need to discuss it with each other. (Jonathan)

Here I pause and take a brief detour in comparing opening up for preaching with a similar area, theatrical performance.³⁵ Attending a theatrical performance has a personal or subjective component: I am in the mood of being entertained or I need a new perspective on certain issues. The spectator's receptivity is partly determined by the definition of his situation, partly by an objective, institutional component: theatrical affiliation. The receptivity of the spectator is also determined by the way in which he relates to theatre as social phenomenon. Theatrical affiliation varies between those people with an annual season ticket and those who only buy a ticket once a year or even for a unique once-in-a-life-time experience; between those who feel connected with certain social groups and those who individually choose to spend a cultural evening at the theatre. It also varies between those to whom theatre is a means to be connected to today's culture, to express values, to be part of a larger framework or life-view that is being communicated in the theatre as performance; or those who are just curious what theatre is like.

Theatrical affiliation partly explains the variety of receptivity among the spectators.³⁶ The affiliation to a social-cultural institution—such as a theatre—represents an external aspect of receptivity. From this we may infer that a social institution enjoys an ontological status of relative external existence and depends upon social agreements and norms for its creation and maintainance. Social institutions have a relative objective ontological existence in relation to the individual and his subjectively defined situation.³⁷ Obviously, the degree of affiliation is still very much individually determined: some feel very affiliated while others feel less attached. However, this does not alter the fact that affiliation is connected to a socially stable or objective reality.

Receptivity in the stage of opening up has a similar institutional and external aspect. Becoming receptive for preaching thus has an objective aspect to, what I

35. The theatrical metaphor is also prevalent in homiletical literature, see e.g. J. Childers, *Performing the Word. Preaching as Theatre*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998); M. Nicol, 'PredigtKunst. Ästhetische Überlegungen zur homiletischen Praxis'. *Praktische Theologie*, 35 (2000):1; M. Nicol, *Einander ins Bild setzen. Dramaturgische Homiletik*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

36. For data on Dutch theatre audience: SCP, *Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 2002. De kwaliteit van de quartaire sector*. (Den Haag: SCP, 2002), p. 610. For an American report, see <http://www.arts.gov/pub/Researchcharts/Summary35.html>.

37. See for an ontology of institutional reality: J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 31–126, J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: philosophy in the real world*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998), pp. 111–134.

call, congregational affiliation. Listeners have got a commitment to the church or to this particular community of believers, they value the phenomenon of preaching compared to other religious practices, and they expect a commonly confessed faith in the sermon. Opening up for preaching is a religious-institutional activity: the listener takes a stance towards preaching as an ecclesial institutional practice and is related to the community of faith, either formally in terms of membership, or incidentally as a guest, a seeker, or an irregular visitor.³⁸

Interestingly, previous research located the institutional dimension of audience receptivity in the convictions and cognitive orientation of the listener towards church doctrine, or even more general, towards the claims of orthodox Christianity. Congregational affiliation is thus subsumed under a set of normative convictions of listeners: the level of orthodoxy of the religious convictions of listeners determines the affiliation of the listener to the congregation. This is certainly one aspect as we will see but the affiliation of the listener with the community of faith does not coincide with their religious beliefs. Affiliation is conceptually broader than the religious convictions of the participants. Previous empirical studies on sermon reception thus limit affiliation in two ways. First, the communal component of receptive is reduced to the question of how progressive believers are or how orthodox. Secondly, the normative-religious orientation functions as a dominant factor of how listeners evaluate the message of the sermon.³⁹ The data in this study challenge this preconception in three ways, which is demonstrated in the following sermon listening incident. The listener is part of a community of faith and this communal aspect shapes opening up:

I have been somewhere else, yes, while this congregation is where you feel at home. So I like that and I, well, I looked forward to hearing the sermon; I have prayed for it, not just for myself but also for, you know, I am a leader in our youth ministry, so I prayed for the teenagers, that the sermon would also address them. Well, than the service starts, and yes, that's nice, you know it's always the way it is and our own minister is present, that's very pleasant because you are closely related. (Caroline)

The next sections present a conceptually more distinct picture of the audience's congregational affiliation. Three aspects of congregational affiliation are relevant

38. So-called seeker-services take religious seekers as target group for worship. See for instance Rick Warren's popular model of *Purpose Driven Church* as example for the institutionalisation of seeker-services. See for the irregular visitor, or 'not-so-much-a-church-goer', C. Stark, 'Kerkgangers bij gelegenheid. Een interviewserie met bekende Nederlanders over hun beleving van de kerkdienst'. in: G. Heitink and H. Stoffels, editors, *Niet zo'n kerkganger. Zicht op buitenkerkelijk geloven*. (Baarn: Ten Have, 2003).

39. See for instance, J. G. M. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders. Sociologische exploratie onder katholieke kerkgangers in de Bondsrepubliek Duitsland*. (Nijmegen: Instituut voor toegepaste sociologie, 1975); B. Grandthyll, *Die Wirkung der Predigt. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer empirischen Überprüfung*. (Münster, 1977); Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören II*.

to explain this aspect of the listener's receptivity in the stage of opening up. These aspects are connected to specific questions concerning the relation between the listener and the social-institutional dimension of preaching: (1) the attitude of the listener towards the sermon as institutional reality: does the sermon represent a *sui generis* means for religious communication?; (2) the listener's sense of belonging: what about his relation with the other members of the audience?; and (3) the confessional aspect: how does he relate to the common faith that is expressed in the congregation's practices of faith including worship and preaching? So communal receptivity is indicated by how important the sermon for the listener is, by how the hearer feels connected with other members in the audience, and by how the listener relates to the confessional identity of the community of faith.

6.4.1 Institutional affiliation: the attitude towards preaching

Protestant theology is clear about the importance of preaching: the preaching of the Word is the central practice of salvation. Heiko Oberman argues that the Reformers replaced the altar by the pulpit, including its sacramental significance: preaching is the primary sacrament, because it communicates grace to the fullest.⁴⁰ Herman Bavinck, for instance, puts the ministry of the Word as central practice prior to the administration of the sacraments.⁴¹ Hendrikus Berkhof, however, broadens the sacramental concept and distinguishes between several 'conducive practices', preaching being one of them.⁴² Berkhof's intuition does not stand on its own. From the seventeenth century pietist theology (Gisbertus Voetius) to the contemporary Quaker spirituality (Richard Foster), the idea that listening to preaching is important though it is not the only means through which God may be encountered is prevalent.⁴³

This superficial glance into the theological literature is confirmed by listeners from their perspective. Listeners reveal various attitudes to preaching as religious institution and this attitude shows how listeners are affiliated to the worshipping community. It determines the way they open up to listen to the sermon. The findings of research by Daiber et al., for example, show how listeners who feel less affiliated to the Church have more difficulties with the institutional aspects of preaching. They agree on statements that preaching helps listeners to make

40. H. A. Oberman, 'Preaching and the Word in the Reformation.' *Theology Today*, 18 (1961):1.

41. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. Volume 4, 5th edition. (Kampen: Kok, 1967).

42. H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

43. See for instance Voetius' "ascetic theology", or *Praxis Pietatis*; also Richard Foster's *The Celebration of Disciplines* (2001). Cf. also B. C. Johnson, *The God Who Speaks. Listening to the Language of God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

sense of their lives, that preaching offers insights on how Christians could live their Christian lives, and that preaching is a conversation between listener's and the opinion of the preacher.⁴⁴ Yet they reject the idea that preachers have some intermediary function and representational office. Only those who express a strong affiliation with the congregation agree with statements like 'as a preacher, in some sense the pastor is proclaimer of the divine Word'. In their study, an institutional attitude towards the phenomenon of preaching clearly correlates with listeners who have a stronger affiliation with the community of faith.

Some listeners cannot imagine a service without a sermon. This is particularly so for listener's who do not express strong bonds with the members of the congregation but who place more value on the preacher. For these people the question of "who is going to preach today" is a much more relevant question than "whom of my fellow believers do I meet". Congregational affiliation to them is very much connected to the sermon, its message and the one who 'delivers' it. They go to church for the sermon: the sermon is their primary means of religious instruction and their practice of faith. Their attitude towards preaching as a religious institution indicates that the preaching event creates a *sui generis* kind of divine-human communication.⁴⁵ Otherwise, it is just the topic of the sermon that stimulates the listener to hurry for church:

It was very early for me. I had had a late night for my husband was late. So I had to set the alarmclock. But I wanted to go to that sermon. I was very interested in the topic. You know, I hadn't heard much about that before, so I rushed to church. But if the topic would have been different would you have stayed at home? No, because I wanted to set an example to my son. During the time my husband didn't go to church, my son sometimes said: I don't believe that I like going to church. Then I said: "I think it's not about liking to go." (Grace)

Others, however, have a lower view on the institution of preaching. This does not indicate communal indifference at all. They visit conferences, listen to speeches and study the bible personally. Though, in the example, Grace would miss the sermon if there had not been one. At the same time a female hearer tells that she could imagine a service without a sermon, because 'one can meet God in different ways: in a song, in a prayer, and sometimes in the people you meet after the service.' Here, the service as a whole is a multivariate aggregate of means for 'experiencing parts of God'—as Anny puts it in the interview. Others, like Deborah for instance, note that they do not need to go to church for practicing their faith. Being alone, strolling around in the woods or just walking the dog

44. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören II*, pp. 223–227.

45. Other research confirms the high expectations of listeners towards preaching, see Day, D., Astley, J. and Francis, L. J., editors, *A Reader on Preaching. Making Connections*. (Ashgate, 2005), p. 270.

can bring peace and quiet. Attending church is important, but you can have similar experiences outside, she says. These examples thus illustrate different attitudes to preaching as religious institution.

Finally, the attitude towards preaching indicates the degree of affiliation to the worshipping community. Those who have a high view on the sermon as institutional 'divine speech' will show a stronger communal receptivity than those who are able to meet God in the open air. Whether preaching communicates God or salvation in a more specific way, for hearers, it creates an affiliation with the larger community of faith that extends their own personal situation. Generally speaking, the hypothesis can be formulated that the stronger the institutional attitude of listeners, the more they feel affiliated with the worshipping community. This sense of belonging is another indicator for affiliation.

6.4.2 Relational affiliation: the sense of belonging

The second indicator for congregational affiliation is the listener's sense of belonging to the community of faith.

It's the familiarity, you know. The forms, well, I am not very strong on that. But sometimes you are touched by the prayers, for those who are ill and, then you think, well, this is the house of God. I am not very much attached to these beautiful buildings. Some can become lyrical about them. It is more like, the singing together, it touches you emotionally. The feeling like 'this is where I belong.'

(John)

This sense of belonging is very relational for John. When he talks about the elderly ladies that he drove to church:

They chatted and were happy that they were able to go to church. Well, sometimes they can be very nagging, that happens too. But then I thought, well it's true. It is great to go to church. That you are in church with the congregation. Looking into the future. [...] Sometimes I think: what kind of world do we inhabit? And then on a Sunday you just come together with like-minded people. Just a tiny part of our society, especially when you live in a city. But then, yes, the alienation is gone for a while.

(John)

Some hearers are astonished about the fact that in the service they meet friends, people they do not come across during the week. But yet, one experiences some kind of friendship (Ronald). They tell stories about the people in the pews behind them and stories that are shared in the small talk after the service. To some respondents church is an opportunity to meet friends, others seize the moment to meet the person that was prayed for during the service or the one they had in mind when the preacher addressed certain issues in the sermon.

Some point to the relational aspect when they address celebrating communion and having a cup of coffee after the service in the same sentence (Elly).

I recall the incident from the interview with Caroline (see above, page 175). She came back to her congregation after a weekend having stayed with her parents and she said ‘It was like coming home again.’ The affiliation to the congregation clearly has a relational aspect. And it is rather striking that most of the studies on preaching as a social event hardly account for the interhuman relationships among the listeners because of their belonging to the same community of faith. Tubbs Tisdale, for example, in her study on preaching as local folk art stimulates preachers to ‘exegete the congregation.’ The guidelines to do so address the authoritative texts and symbols of the congregation, demographical data and the cultural identity of the congregation including its worldview and ethos. The relationships between people, the networks in which people develop a sense of belonging and the congregational structures that facilitate people to meet and build relationships, the significants of these networks for the practice of faith, and their impact upon worship and preaching, however, are omitted from the “thick descriptions” that Tubbs Tisdale encourages preachers to construct as if they were ‘amateur ethnographers.’⁴⁶

The relational aspect makes clear that listeners who feel connected to other people in the pews and affiliate stronger to the congregation accordingly, also develop a special type of receptivity. They do not only focus upon their own situatedness, but they listen more persistingly even when the sermon does not address their issues. It is not uncommon to hear people saying: ‘well, it was not of my concern, but I am sure that someone else in the congregation experienced consolation.’ This communal receptivity is an important force in opening up to hearing the sermon.⁴⁷ They sometimes even point to specific people they had in mind when the preacher addressed a certain issue. Togetherness of singing, praying and the fellowship after the service build a sense of belonging that contributes to an objective kind of receptivity that transcends the personal and individual. But what makes the Christian community different? Elly responds: ‘The world I live in, let’s say the world of my work, is a tough world, a world of everyone for oneself. In church people do pay attention to me and that’s what I like in our congregation.’ I asked her whether she might have the same experience outside church, for instance in a club. She answered ‘Less I think. Because in church you share your faith in Christ.’ The relational almost naturally blends into the confessional.

46. L. Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 56–90, esp. 90.

47. The fact that they indeed make ‘third person’ identifications with the world of the sermon, however, is dealt with in section 9.4.

6.4.3 Confessional affiliation: believing together

Not every listener has a strong sense of belonging. Shana, for instance, told that she attends church in a neighbouring city while her entire social network is located in the village she lives in. Though she knows almost everyone, she still felt an outsider in the local church. Relationships have not been the problem, her high view of preaching and the messages preached are. From her perspective, the sermons do not appeal to what she has come to believe in. So she rather chooses to attend church elsewhere though she admits that she visits her local church every other week because she feels she belongs there. Shana's lack of a sense of belonging to the people she worships with does not imply that she does not have any communal awareness at all because the confessional aspect of congregational affiliation places communality in 'the things we believe together'. So besides relationships and belonging, there is another aspect that helps listeners to open up for the sermon. The third indicator of communal receptivity is believing together, the confessional affiliation of the listener with the community of faith.

Some people decide to affiliate to this particular congregation because of the way in which the central tenets of the Christian faith are believed and expressed. In the interviews with listeners, people who are rather outspoken on this aspect refer to the confessional identity of the congregation compared to other churches—even within their own denomination.

Sermons have a message concerning the future, you know. Eternal life. It can't be that it's like: well, we live today, and we'll see what happens next. I think that God's Word is very clear on this. And the sermons that I hear are like: take into account [the future], be prepared. If you compare that with the other congregation in town, well, it's hardly an issue there, at least, it is not as emphasised as it is in our church. (Eric)

Here we encounter the confessional aspect in opening up: Eric expects that the sermon is about eternal life, it is a feature of their church and 'God's Word is clear about it' he states. The fact that he compares his church with another church in town, gives the impression that the confessional aspect comes close to what J. G. M. Sterk has called the 'religious-ecclesial orientation' of listeners.⁴⁸ Sterk distinguishes between progressive and traditional (or orthodox) orientations and argues that progressive believers—those people who are less affiliated to the church and its normative teachings—experience more tension in listening to sermons and have more difficulties with balancing their existing beliefs and the message that is preached than those who have traditional and orthodox religious

48. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders*, pp. 88-98, 403-409.

convictions.⁴⁹ The religious-ecclesial orientation of listeners is used to explain listener behaviour and their resolvment of the message of the sermon in terms of its evaluation: agreeing or disagreeing, acceptance or rejection. In short, his study departs from the idea that existing normative beliefs and convocations concerning the Christian faith govern the receptivity of listeners. But something else is at stake here, not so much the degree of progressivity or orthodoxy that controls the meaning of the sermon yet the consistency between the listener's own convictions concerning God and the world and the worshipping community. To put it differently, the confessional aspect reveals how the 'catholicity' of the church works for hearers and how they open up for the sermon. Listeners have an attitude of catholicity in the sense that they open up for listening from an idea of how Christian faith should sound and must be professed. Previous research—such as Sterk's and Grandhyll's⁵⁰—was more interested in the differences between strict and liberal churches and thus neglected how communal awareness in listening works.

Believing together in the stage of opening up thus includes a kind of awareness on the part of the audience that contributes to the communal experience of worship, it creates in the listener an expectation of how God is named in the sermon, and it opens up the listener beyond a mere cognitive distinction between progressive or orthodox belief-systems. Obviously, the confessional aspect involves the listener's 'biography' of faith though 'pistography' may be a better term to indicate the idea of the listener's personal history of faith.⁵¹ Further, the confessional dimension of receptivity points to an awareness that Christian faith is believed in the midst of these people at this place and which the preacher is supposed to express and to articulate in the sermon. It makes the sermon a communal realm that is inhabited by the listener.⁵² It resounds from past experiences, it connects the listener with a larger body of faith to which he feels himself part of it. It makes the listener feel part of an extended audience: extending beyond the boundaries of the interpersonal relationships between the listener and his local fellow believers (the relational aspect). In some sense, the confessional aspect is discriminating: this is how we believe and this is the community of faith I am part of. In another sense, however, it indicates how the catholicity of Christian faith is part of the hearer's receptivity and how it

49. Here Sterk's theoretical framework of consistency theory comes in. For the psychological theory of cognitive dissonance, see L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. (Stanford: University Press, 1957). 'All consistency theories', Littejohn observes, 'begin with the same premise: People are more comfortable with consistency than inconsistency ... they seek homeostasis [and] aim to achieve self-maintenance and balance.' Cf. Littlejohn, *Human Communication*, p. 126.

50. Cf. Grandhyll, *Die Wirkung der Predigt*, pp. 72–74.

51. Further research, theoretical sampling and conceptualisation might take this concept as starting point, saturate it and turn it into a theoretical code or formal theory.

52. See further stage 2, dwelling in the sermon, discussed in the following chapters.

shapes opening up accordingly since the listener is part of a larger community of believers that indeed extends beyond the borders of this local parish.

6.5 EXAMPLES OF OPENING UP

Opening up thus varies according to the receptivity of the listener. We have seen that receptivity has three components. Subjective receptivity is connected with the listener's defined situation of faith (section 6.3); communal receptivity is bound to the institutional aspects of opening up (section 6.4), and finally liturgical receptivity depends on the sermon-worship relationship (section 6.2). Receptivity is thus a property of listening and is shaped by the listener's relation to the preaching event as 'institutional fact'⁵³, the self-definition of the listener's faith, and the liturgical sequence in which the listener participates. Religious receptivity is a complex whole and the subjective and external aspects sometimes reflect contrary interests:

Sometimes, I am just not motivated at all to go to church. But you know, you do not go for yourself alone, you go to church for the Lord, isn't it? (Grace)

Obviously, when the two main aspects of receptivity, situated faith and communal affiliation, concur in opening up, the religious motivation of the listener to become part of the sermon is optimal: a searching soul because of life-circumstances, with an explicitly defined faith-relationship, combined with a high view on preaching, a sense of belonging and a strong confessional identity with the worshipping community. Yet the 'real world' of opening up is not as ideal as this optimal scenario suggests though this does not imply that it does not exist at all. Perhaps Kathy's position comes close to a strong combination of situated and communal receptivity when she stresses the need to be in church and holding on to her faith in God while being in a very critical situation.⁵⁴ However, sometimes life-circumstances are so devastating that the subjective dimension takes over communal receptivity or the other way around, the institutional dimension of receptivity is so strong that the trivialities of life are bypassed as irrelevant. These two kinds of opening up may be distinguished as *leaving behind the situation* in which communal receptivity is dominant for the listener, or as *in view of the situation* in which the subjective side of receptivity (situated receptivity) is stronger than all feelings of belonging or confessional attitudes together.

On the one hand, listeners embark on hearing the sermon while they leave behind their specific situation and focus on the sermon because of a heteronomous authority of the sermon or the fact that what is preached within this community of faith is worthwhile in itself. Sometimes this *leaving behind the situation*

53. For institutional facts, see Searle, *Construction*, pp. 113–126.

54. See above, section 6.3.1.

requires a conscious effort of the listener to leave behind the worries of everyday life, the events coming up next week, or other things that have been occupying the mind:

It's for me some sort of outing. Leaving behind daily routine; one hour without worrying. You are together, singing; every one is rather dressy, glad. Well, you're lifted up for a moment without those things you care about. (Elly)

It is like the community of believers taking over. Communal receptivity thus has a liberating effect. It helps the listener to move beyond the personal situation—hard as it may be sometimes—and let himself become part of the institutionalised event of worship and preaching. Moving beyond the situation and opening up is closely connected to the way in which the liturgy enfolds and the liturgical sequence facilitates opening up for the listener. There is something coming from another side and the listener is busy leaving behind the complexity of life to become receptive to something else.

On the other hand, when listeners subsume the corporate dimension under the definition of the situation of lived-faith, the worship service (including the sermon) is experienced *in view of the situation*. The hearer has a lower sense of congregational affiliation—with its institutional, relational, and confessional aspects—and his own defined situation or life of faith is primary. Opening up serves his own needs as they appear in the latent or prominent definition of faith as it is lived. One listener tells about her anger when she enters the service and how the sermon is supposed to help her manage this anger. Another listener tells how family issues sometimes take over when he is in church:

Sometimes you leave church, not knowing what he (the preacher) has been talking about, because you were busy with other issues, you know, issues in the family. I have a large family and I try to keep up with everybody. (John)

Being in church, belonging to a community of believers, taking part in corporate worship is overruled by the definition of the situation that calls for attention. The sermon is meant to clarify the hearer's situation, and the communal agenda of the congregation is secondary to this personal motive for listening. Receptiveness *in view of the situation* puts the corporate or institutional affiliation of the hearer behind the listener's own definition of his life of faith in the here and now. The more urgent the definition of faith as it is lived seems to be, the more listeners tend to become receptive in view of the situation. The starting point for opening up is the hearer's individual and subjective understanding of the here and now situation of faith. The listener with a more dominant situated receptivity starts hearing the sermon from an *in view of the situation* attitude. Because, as Shana says, 'sometimes I am in church and my mind is so occupied, especially right

now, so many memories, all kinds of stuff in my mind, that I just, cannot listen. It just passes by...’

The various examples of opening up show how the components of receptivity puts the listener into a position when the sermon starts. However, the fact *that* the sermon starts is due to an external structure, namely the liturgy. At some point during the service of worship, as we have seen above (section 6.2.1), the sermon just starts, usually anticipated though outside the listener’s control. Here the listener enters the next stage of getting religiously involved, he starts to dwell in the sermon.

7

EXPERIENCING THE SERMON

Dwelling in the sermon, part 1: meditative environment

7.1 RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT AND DWELLING IN THE SERMON

The difference between a sermon and a lecture, as one of the listeners puts it, is involvement.

A sermon needs to address you as individual. With a lecture you're digging deeply into the material, but it just does not have a connection with me. It is up to me to stay tuned, it is not directed to me. (Caroline)

The concept of involvement points to a complex area of interaction between a preacher, a sermon and the hearers. In this area religion 'occurs': involvement has to do with faith, the relationship between God and humans. Becoming involved in the sermon is not just becoming part of an interesting, educational or entertaining piece of discourse but is religiously qualified for hearers. It is about being related to God, being strengthened in this relationship, and encountered with a divine perspective on human existence.¹ In the next chapters we will find how involvement is shaped in hearing a sermon. Opening up is followed by a second stage: *dwelling in the sermon*, in which the hearer becomes part of a religious world, performed by a preacher. Dwelling is something that occurs and something that listeners do.² On the one hand listeners agree that action is needed on their part: they have to stay tuned, to keep focussed upon what the preacher is saying. When a sermon did not bring what they hoped for they do not just blame the preacher but many hearers honestly take responsibility for the preaching event: 'it's up to me to concentrate, to listen, to stay in', they say. Hence, from the perspective of listeners, getting involved in the sermon is not entirely beyond their control. They have a part to play. The audience, however,

1. Chapter 10 presents the final stage of getting religiously involved.

2. On 'audience activity' see section 2.4.3.

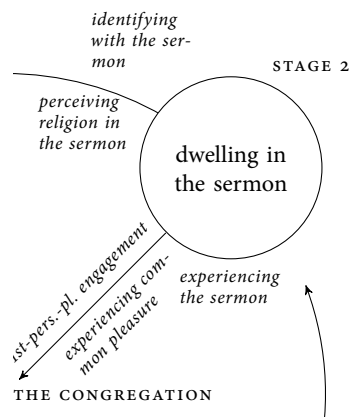


Figure 7.1 Dwelling in the Sermon

is not the only party in the field. Hearers expect that the preacher takes pains to address them in such a way that the sermon connects to their own lives of faith. They use different phrases to indicate that the preacher has to do his part: to exercise his apostolic calling to preach the gospel, to communicate faith, and to personally embody the preached message but they do not come to church for the personal opinions of a preacher. 'It's nice to hear what he [viz. the preacher] thinks of himself,' one listener says, 'but it's up to me to deal with it or not. He only needs to pass on the Word of God.' Hence the preacher does not represent some autonomous charismatic or political (moral) authority.

Various metaphors and conceptualisations of the complex relationship between preacher, sermon and listener have been offered by homileticians such as the sermon as a piece of open art, the listener as meaning-making individual or secondary preacher.³ While dwelling in the sermon the listener is not so much a creator of another sermon but another metaphor is more fitting: the listener is walking around, experiencing the world of the sermon; he perceives realities or finds himself unable to see 'the points', and identifies with these realities or fails to find a home in the sermon. In other words, the listener attempts to dwell in the sermon.⁴ Dwelling in the sermon is an experience, it entails perception, and in being in the world of the sermon, the listener makes all kinds of iden-

3. Chapter 2 and 3 present the various metaphors and models. Further, section 8.1 challenges the hermeneutical idea of 'understanding' as primary category to conceptualise the role of the listener in hearing a sermon.

4. See section 11.3 for the metaphor of the sermon as 'home'.

tifications between elements in the sermon and his own life of faith or that of others. Figure 7.1 presents dwelling in the sermon as a —clockwise—movement from experience towards identification. Recent communication research offers the following definition of audience involvement: ‘the degree to which audience members engage in reflection upon, and parasocial interaction with, certain media programs, thus resulting in overt behavior change.’⁵ Involvement is thus placed between the media and their effects. It occupies the middle ground between audience motivations, selection, and values on the one hand and the outcomes and consequences of communication on the other hand. *Religious involvement* (and its experiential, attentive and existential aspects) is not just a fine theological concept to complement its conceptual brother ‘audience involvement’ as is used in the scholarly apparatus of communication studies. Notions like ‘religious’ or ‘faith’ do not provide denominators for theology’s sake only. They single out a separate domain like, for instance, ‘social’ does in concepts like social groups, social networks, social roles and social involvement.⁶ Using ‘religious involvement’ does not create a self-contained conceptual reserve to store theological language but denotes a special area in which the concept functions to single out the field of faith in God, communion with God, trust, and belief.⁷ Religious involvement, as occurs in the interaction between preacher and audience, borders on the study of audiences in non-religious practices.⁸

First, involvement is about perception and its core idea of attention. *Attentive involvement* is dealt with in Chapter 8. I will show that attention is coloured by a particular illocutionary area (kerugmatic, textual or life-world related), that it is characterised by concentration-span, and formed by factors that relate to the performance of the preacher, the competence of the listener, and the structure of the sermonic world. Next, the quotation at the beginning of this chapter introduces notions of connection and individuality. Listeners identify with the world of the sermon or feel alienated. I will introduce the aspect of *existential involvement* in Chapter 9.

This chapter, however, focusses on a third aspect of involvement, namely *experiential involvement*. It presents the hearing experience and its two main dimensions of pleasure and functionality in listening. The dimensions of experiential involvement are qualified as liturgical-immediate and situational-reflective

5. S. Sood, ‘Audience Involvement and Entertainment-Education.’ *Communication Theory*, 12 (2002):2, p. 156

6. More on this, see above, section 2.5, 3.5, and 4.4.

7. See F. G. Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

8. In my stipulation non-religious practices do not have religious claims as their normative make-up. Further, non-religious practices do not necessarily entail a-religious or even anti-religious practices though the latter are clearly non-religious.

listening respectively. Listening has an immediate quality because it has an intrinsic meaning, the communal expression of faith (section 7.4); the reflective dimension on the other hand points to an extrinsic value, the usefulness of the sermon for the listener's situation of lived faith (section 7.5). Both pleasure and functionality are part of the listener's interaction with the sermon and reflect the classic Augustinian distinction between *frui* and *uti* (section 7.3). First, however, dwelling in the sermon is a 'spatial' experience, so the next section presents the sermon as *meditative environment* (section 7.2). The remainder of this chapter explains the dimensions of beauty and usefulness of the meditative environment.

7.2 THE SERMON AS MEDITATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Hearing a sermon is moving around within a world, looking and experiencing what 'happens' in this world in which the promise of the gospel is narrated.⁹ The sermon constitutes a whole and projects a world of faith, hearing the sermon entails exploring this world, entertaining it or using it.¹⁰ This moving around in the world of the gospel has features of what in the Christian tradition is called 'meditation', a spiritual practice that is foremost a mental exercise.¹¹ Jonathan explains how this works in hearing a sermon:

That might have to do with the fact that those sidesteps to other churches were not pursued, because those sermons were not challenging enough. Too simple. And yes, that's what I see in this [traditional] church. Anyway, why would you choose a church like this when you're not used to go to church at all? I think it's the complexity, the level of difficulty. On the one hand it blocks you, and on the other hand it's attractive. *It makes me think, a kind of meditation, consideration. And that happens with me personally, individually. I have to work it out for myself.* (Jonathan)

A popular definition counts meditation among the 'inward' disciplines of Christian spirituality in which the practitioner attempts 'to see the Word of God at work [...] and we withdraw into silence where we prayerfully and steadily focus

9. About kerugmatic realities in the sermon, see section 8.3.3. For the notion 'narrated promise of the gospel', see R. F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology. The Gospel as Narrated Promise*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

10. See for the notion 'world-projection', N. Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Wolterstorff's ontology of artefacts is applied in homiletics by John Rottman, see J. M. Rottman, *Doing Things with Words in a Sermon: Preaching as a Performative Activity*. Ph. D thesis, (Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto, 1996).

11. 'Meditation' is only a helpful notion to understand what listening is like. Obviously, the practice of meditation is much broader than hearing a sermon and has various other properties than those connected to the preaching event. It requires more theoretical sampling and analysis to construct a grounded theory on Christian meditation.

on it.¹² Meditation is a mentally conducted, rather than factually, acted-out activity that resides into or better ‘onto’ other practices such as reading, seeing or listening. Seeing a beautiful sunset may trigger meditation. Reading a text one may start meditating ‘on’ it. ‘We meditate on what comes before us,’ Dallas Willard writes.¹³ Or as Otto Haendler explains: meditation is ‘the living activity of our most inward mental and spiritual organs, with which we apprehend life’s reality and achieve the depth and power and essentiality of our own being.’¹⁴

Deborah points out at several moments in the interview that going to church for her is a weekly resting-point. She explains that she likes the fact that the pastor preaches and prays because then you do not have to do it yourself. Someone else is in charge. The climate in the service is such that she can sit down quietly, just to listen and almost to relax and let someone else do the talking. Then she moves on by telling that she sometimes enters the service filled with rage. She moves around in another world to find answers to burning questions:

Then I sit there with a feeling like “now something has to happen, something that really engages me.” I have this anger in me. With all these images on television. What a mess this world is! How can people act like that? Then I’ve got to find something. I must, I want to find something. There are so many things that I do not understand. But then I think, yes. And it is like that the preacher acts like, well, think for yourself. Try to find a way out! And I always find something. And well, usually I calm down. (Deborah)

In homiletics, meditation usually refers to an activity for preachers: a stage in the preparation of the sermon in which the preacher finds an entrance into the text, wrestles with it in front of the situation, engages spiritually with the text, and has the text spoken to himself in reading and studying.¹⁵ Meditation, however, is not something only preachers do. In hearing, listeners attentively concentrate on what is being said. They wrestle with the ‘text’ of the sermon, like Deborah wrestles with the sermon in view of the anger that she has brought with her. They have the sermon spoken to them and engage with what they encounter in the world of the sermon. Listeners come to understand what is going on in the world of the sermon differently; their listening behaviour shows variable degrees of concentration; some wander off; others doze away. But when they talk about the listening experience, they agree on the importance of attention

12. D. Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines. Understanding how God changes lives*. 1st edition. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 183.

13. Ibid., p. 183.

14. Cited in W. Saft, ‘Meditation’. in: *The Encyclopedia of Christianity. Volume 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 487–488. See further Haendler’s *Meditation als Lebenspraxis*, Göttingen 1977.

15. Though without empirical grounding Douma gives a detailed description of the function of meditation in the process of sermon preparation. Cf. J. Douma, *Veni Creator Spiritus. De meditatie in het preekproces*. (Kok, 2000).

and concentration. Further, listeners arrive at different levels of identification in the process of listening. To some, the sermon remains a distant world which they can hardly relate to; to others, it is their world of faith. They are able to dwell in the world of the sermon as an expression of their own world of faith. They move around in the world of the sermon to 'find something to calm down' as Deborah puts it.

The comparison of hearing a sermon and meditation emphasises four important aspects: (1) the aspect of climate or the space in which meditation takes place; (2) the aspect of 'otherness'; (3) the aspect of concentration; and (4) the aspect of connection.

The fragment from Deborah indicates two properties of the meditative environment in which listening takes place: quietness and otherness. First, listening takes place in a quiet space, an environment that is free from other activities since there is nothing else to do or to worry about than just being there. To many listeners, quietness is an important feature of the sermon that also extends to other parts of the worship service: to dwell in a quiet space, to reflect upon life, to experience faith. No other claims are made, no appointments are due, nothing of 'what needs to be done' calls for attention. Listening is sitting. Sometimes they worry about tomorrow; sometimes they are annoyed by what the preacher presents or disturbed by a performance that violates the quiet space. A loud voice, for example. Sometimes hindered by other factors such as a church building packed with people. Despite all this, listening is about experiencing a quiet moment of celebration or reflection. So hearers need a quiet atmosphere to find new 'breath'. Next, in listening the audience thus enters 'another world'.¹⁶ The substantial quality of 'otherness' conditions listening to the sermon as a form of meditation. Everyday life may be vastly present in the listeners mind yet it is put in another perspective. Participating in the sermon is thus breathing a different kind of air. Preaching projects a (temporary) world and the listeners are invited to be or to become its inhabitants, to breath the air of another world. Sometimes listeners are having a hard time finding the inner peace they need to concentrate, to focus on and pay attention to the world of the sermon. They tell about how occupied they are by what is going on in their lives and how the listening experience generates a clash between their everyday existence and the narrated world of the sermon. Yet this clash also creates an opportunity to re-enter the situation of life.

The sermon listening incident taken from the interview with Deborah also demonstrates two other aspects of meditation, attention and connection. There

16. For spatial language to denote the preaching event, see for instance F. Wittekind, 'Predigt als Deutungsraum. Zum Wortverständnis protestantischer Predigt'. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 6 (2002):1.

is an attentiveness towards the actual mess in the world; there is a longing for engagement and connection to find answers that really fit the anger which emerges from the burning issues. Meditation is an apt description of how listeners get attentively and existentially involved in the world of the sermon. The following two chapters present these two components of the meditative practice of listening in more detail in which getting involved is worked out in terms of attention and concentration on the one hand and in existential terms like identification and personal engagement on the other hand. This chapter, however, draws attention to the larger aspect of how quietness and otherness in the environment of the sermon is experienced by the listener.

7.3 AN AUGUSTINIAN DISTINCTION: ENJOYING AND USING THE SERMON

When looking back upon the sermon, hearers deal with it as an holistic experience. Adjectives like nice, beautiful, stimulating, challenging, confronting, faith-strengthening, educational, tough, etc. indicate this experiential aspect. They also include a positive or negative evaluation of the sermon but focusing solely on evaluations may miss the more central idea of the wholistic experience. The sermon is a totality, experienced either as a joyful event or worse, a boring occasion. Listeners do not evaluate the sermon as 'fine' if the listening experience has not been fine as well. So the adjective that is used to predicate something of the sermon refers to the listening experience and this experience transcends the evaluations that are usually only measured as opinions or beliefs about the sermon. In talking about the listening experience, the listener reveals his attitude towards this particular sermonic event. This attitude has an evaluative aspect, such as the sermon was good or bad, challenging or boring,¹⁷ but the evaluative aspect is not as nearly as interesting for the research question of this study than the experiential aspect is. What do listeners experience when they dwell in the sermon as meditative environment? What characterises the attitudes¹⁸ of hearers

17. The nature of these judgements, how they relate to different groups of listeners, what generates those evaluations, and what good or bad qualities of a sermon are, have been the object of research in other empirical homiletical research. On the evaluation of sermons, see for instance J. G. M. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders. Sociologische exploratie onder katholieke kerkgangers in de Bondsrepubliek Duitsland*. (Nijmegen: Instituut voor toegepaste sociologie, 1975). For qualities of the sermon that generate *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*-related responses among the audience, see R. J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

18. According to an influential theory on attitudes, an attitude is a social-psychological construct that contains three distinct reactions to a certain object, a behavioural, a cognitive, and an affective response. Attitudes are, therefore, closely related to evaluations. Cf. D. Stahlberg and D. Frey, 'Attitudes. Structure, Measurement and Functions' in: M. Hewstone, W. Stroebe and G. M. Stephenson, editors, *Introduction to Social Psychology*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996),

with respect to the listening experience?

Two distinct attitudes towards the sermon frame the listening experience: a functional and an aesthetic attitude. The functional attitude is about the usefulness of the sermon, a reflective kind of listening and it relates the listening experience to the life-situation of the listener. Hence, the functional attitude towards the sermon is *situational-reflective*. To dwell in the sermon situationally-reflectively, hearers long for practical sermons, sermons that make them think about life-issues, or that provides insights to make difficult choices or to deal with theological issues. Listeners experience the sermon in a reflective way when the sermon points them to the reality of faith, when it creates new insights, when it makes alive knowledge that had been neglected, when it gives listeners something to think about, or when it enables listeners to discern a 'Monday'-connection, viz. to relate the sermon to their everyday lives. What can I get out of this sermon for tomorrow? How does it help me to shape my religious practice? How does it make me think and feel about my relationship with God? In listening, the listener meditates on the sermon in a reflective mood: what does it have to say to me, how does it redefine my situation of faith, how do I have to act etc.

On the other hand, there is an aesthetic aspect to the listening experience. The aesthetic attitude emerges from sermon evaluations that point to beauty rather than to usefulness in hearing a sermon. This attitude is closely related to the sermon as liturgical piece, it creates an experience that is worthwhile in itself. Listeners dwell in the sermon in an *liturgical-immediate sense*. There is a kind of enjoyment that results from 'being immersed in a narrative world'.¹⁹ The hearers experience the sermon more as religious ritual since the sermon provides them with an opportunity to experience faith, to practice faith together and to feel at home in the religious world that is projected in the sermon. The sermon expresses their religious beliefs in such a way that they entertain these beliefs during listening. The sermon therefore embodies their faith.

The difference between these two attitudes lies in the value of the sermon as something valuable *in itself* (intrinsic value) or valuable *in view of something else* (extrinsic value). The distinction between *uti* and *frui* developed by St. Augustin in his homiletical treatise *De doctrina Christiana* is helpful to understand the difference between the two listening attitudes: there are realities that must be enjoyed, while others must be used. The first make us happy, the latter help us in

pp. 206–209 and A. Eagly and S. Chaiken, *Psychology of Attitudes*. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993).

19. See for this concept M. C. Green, T. C. Brock and G. F. Kaufman, 'Understanding Media Enjoyment. The Role of Transportation Into Narrative Worlds'. *Communication Theory*, 14 (2004):4.

our strive to happiness.²⁰ Functional listening is about the extrinsic value of the sermon—the ‘uti’-part, beauty and pleasure in listening points to the intrinsic value of the sermon—the ‘frui’-part. When hearing a sermon is worthwhile in itself, the necessity to present a summary of the sermon afterwards is less pressing, just hearing makes (religiously) happy. To ask what the sermon has been about is less relevant to the hearer. To be there, is more important than being able to summarize the contents of the sermon afterwards.²¹

The fact that some listeners clearly listen functionally while others specifically dwell in the sermon for an experience of pleasure, does not entail that the two attitudes are mutually exclusive. It only means that some hearers are stronger on the functional attitude than on the liturgical-immediate attitude. Dwelling in the sermon is both situational and liturgical, it is both about beauty and use. In hearing a sermon, the listener wonders how the sermon may connect to his own situation of faith while simultaneously, he feels at home in the world of faith projected in the sermon. The two following sections examine the two attitudes towards the listening experience in more detail.

7.4 PLEASURE IN LISTENING: THE LITURGICAL-IMMEDIATE ATTITUDE

The value of hearing a sermon does not lie in remembering the message of the sermon afterwards. The listening experience has a quality of its own, it constitutes an attitude of enjoyment²²:

I was in church and it was great. Really great. All of it. Actually, everything spoke to me, I mean, I was able to follow the sermon and to understand it. Not all details of course. Afterwards we said: it's impossible to recollect it, you know. I think nobody can. Some listeners are taking notes. I guess that would be points or something, I don't know. Really, it was great! (Marc)

Here Marc refers to the ‘whole’ of the sermon and the aesthetic attitude that comes with it: listening is beautiful. The whole, however, is larger than its parts witnessing his remark on the people who take notes. It is a reduction to the experience, he suggests, to break down the sermon in points and the experience

20. Augustin, *On Christian Doctrine. In Four Books*. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) (URL: <http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/doctrine/>), Book I.3.

21. Ciska Stark uses a similar distinction when she distinguishes between ‘rationalists’ and ‘mystics’ in an explorative essay on the experience of worship and preaching. See C. Stark, ‘Kerkgangers bij gelegenheid. Een interviewserie met bekende Nederlanders over hun beleving van de kerkdienst’, in: G. Heitink and H. Stoffels, editors, *Niet zo'n kerkganger. Zicht op buitenkerkelijk geloven*. (Baarn: Ten Have, 2003).

22. For this concept see R. L. Nabi and M. Krcmar, ‘Conceptualisation Media Enjoyment as Attitude: Implications for Mass Media Effects Research’. *Communication Theory*, 14 (2004):4.

is much larger than to give a recollection of it afterwards. This pattern in the data, the experience of pleasure and beauty in hearing a sermon challenges a preoccupation in many reception studies, namely that the value of listening could be measured in terms of cognitive retention. The fact that hearing a sermon has an intrinsic quality does not only challenge this preoccupation with retention but also highlights a dimension of the listening experience that has been overlooked. A fine sermon is just that.²³

7.4.1 Listening as liturgy

The incident from the interview with Marc points to another feature of listening as liturgical experience. There is a gap between the experience and the way listeners are able to reflect upon the experience. Marc is not very able to precisely articulate what made the sermon such a fine experience. The liturgical-immediate experience emerges right in the middle of this ‘gap’ in the conversation with listeners, at which point they cannot exactly articulate what they enjoyed in listening to the sermon.

When the preacher built up a tension the sermon moved towards a climax.
A tension that lead somewhere. So you experienced something together as
community. Something from God. I believe that, yes. (Caroline)

There is hardly any reflection here. The listener points to a ‘phenomenal’ experience. The language indicates immediacy. Yet this immediacy does not refer to a mere individual-subjective or personal-mystical experience but the respondent includes the community of faith. The experience is part of what the community as a whole is doing. Listening is thus a kind of liturgy. The incident from Caroline illustrates how listeners resort to language of ‘something’ that had happened without being able to tell what the preacher exactly said. This is not a feature of inable respondents or incompetent interviewing. This phenomenon also occurs among highly educated and very linguistically competent respondents. Listening has a phenomenal aspect that cannot be sufficiently captured when we ask listeners to summarize the main points or the core ideas of the sermon. Sometimes listeners report that they very much liked the sermon. They remember they enjoyed listening. Simultaneously, they feel almost ashamed that they are not able to tell more about what the preacher said.

‘It was good to be there’. When listeners report that they enjoyed being in the service they qualify the listening experience *qua* experience. Listening to the sermon is part of the larger liturgical event. Some listeners even equate the sermon with liturgy: without sermon the service would not just be incomplete,

23. For the discovery of this aspect of the listening experience, see above, section 5.2.3, also the first example of memoing in section 5.3.3.

it would lack its essential core. Previous research confirms this centrality of preaching among listeners.²⁴ Listening is worship. It is part of the dramatic flow of the liturgy.²⁵

Easter creates some kind of anaesthesia, but Easter calls for Pentecost. That I underlined [in his notes on the sermon]. Easter calls for Pentecost. Because, I mean, He is crucified, we are all upset, and then he rises from the death. We are not finished with that, oh no, because I don't believe it at all! And then he gives us in the sermon aspects of the Spirit. Because we try in our limited existence, we try to create images, dreams, feelings, tastings of the Spirit. I feel like being on a cloud, something like that. So you try to find words to indicate what you feel.

(Ronald)

So it happens *in* listening. The sermon helps the believer to make the movement from Easter to Pentecost. The images and feelings in the sermon create an immediate experience for the listener. Not just the fact that he feels part of what the sermon is about but also that *within* the preaching event the liturgical journey is represented and experienced.²⁶ It was not so much its usefulness for daily life that made the sermon worth listening to since the sermon is not listened to as a means to something else. Essential to the listening experience is affective arousal and emotional engagement. Being there, enjoying what is being said, feeling part of the story that is narrated. The fragment from the interview with Ronald illustrates that the language is emotional and affective when the listener talks about the overall event of listening.

A conversation with Jonathan illustrates the situation when this intrinsic value of the listening experience is lacking. He tells about a depressing sermon. The preacher talked about human's transient existence in this earthly life. Indeed, not a message to be enjoyed. However, the fact that Jonathan was not able to enjoy the preaching event was not due to its rather depressing voice but because it did not speak his faith. It did not represent his faith and he wasn't able to identify with this sermon. It would be too hasty to conclude that enjoyment does not take place when the sermon is somewhat depressing. However the broader idea is confirmed that emotional engagement of the listener explains whether the listener experiences the sermon liturgically or not.

24. See for instance C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005), pp. 250–253 and H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 202–203.

25. See above, 6.2.2.

26. For 'liturgical preaching', see J. S. McClure, *Preaching Words. 144 Key Terms in Homiletics*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), pp. 76–79.

The liturgical-immediate dimension of listening also qualifies the *temporal features* of the listening experience. Listening consists of a series of relative separate moments: listeners sometimes listen attentively, and sometimes they mentally wander off; their concentration is either strong, or they are distracted by their environment or occupied by their own thoughts.²⁷ Listeners report moments of concentrated listening. Moments in which they experience grace, or in which they are overwhelmed by a sense that ‘everything will be all right’, or moments in which they rest in the trust divine acceptance despite of the circumstances of everyday life. These rather rare but intense moments of listening constitute a phenomenal experience. A listener feels part of a reality that transcends the here-and-now life, a moment that is characterised by celebration and joy.²⁸ Judith says: ‘I cannot remember it now, but it is the moment in church, when it speaks to you...’; this utterance perfectly illustrates the immediacy of the listening moment.

7.4.2 Sacramentality? Listening as communal religious enactment

Enjoyment, however, is not only a quality of *moments* of concentrated listening. It also qualifies the listening experience as a whole, a temporal sequence as it continues from the beginning to the end of the sermon. This durative kind of immediacy may be less intensive than the moments of concentration that I just mentioned yet it qualifies the entire event of listening in terms of immediacy. It is feeling at home in the sermon. This durative quality of enjoyment and immediacy appears in another incident in the interview with Caroline. Superficially, she gives a normative description of what a sermon should be, the pattern, however, is that of the ‘gestalt’ of the listening experience:

Perhaps, I think, that I wish to hear about the Lord Jesus. That is what makes listening to a sermon valuable for me. I would like to understand how the text of the bible is related to Jesus and what he has done [...] So, I would like being taught, you know. On the other hand, you need to hear it, even if it is not something entirely new, so that you do not doze off. That you start thinking, well, that’s it, I think I know it all [...] Yes, I do go to church to be taught about the bible. And it makes me happy when I hear about Jesus. That’s the gospel. That’s not supposed to be missing. Actually, that’s why I do it. That’s giving me joy.

(Caroline)

27. These aspects of the listening experience are further developed when dealing with attentive involvement, see section 8.2 and the durative aspect of actualising faith, see section 10.2.

28. For the celebrative mood of actualising faith, see Chapter 10.

The sermon builds a world in which the listener feels at home.²⁹ Caroline wants to hear about Jesus. Not because she has not heard about Jesus before; but because it makes her happy. 'That's the gospel', she says. And that is why she listens to a sermon. As a renewed enactment of what she believes in. This durative aspect of immediacy concerns the experience of 'being entailed in the gospel'. She has a clear conviction on what the sermon is supposed to represent. This implies that a sermon that is not entirely new at all but talks about 'Jesus and what he has done' will be valued better than a creative sermon that gives a lot to think about but lacks 'what gives her joy'. Listening in the mode of immediacy is practicing the language of faith. This is not so much an individual enterprise but a corporate enactment: the shared beliefs of the community are expressed.³⁰

Immediacy as it emerged from the durative feature of the listening experience has an important corporate aspect.³¹ The practice of listening and the practice of community overlap since through listening the listener participates in the community of faith. Hence, the liturgical aspect of listening qualifies the listening experience as *ritual communication*. 'Ritual or expressive communication depends on shared understandings and emotions. It is celebratory, consummatory and decorative rather than utilitarian.'³² It is not so much about the transmission of information but it describes communication in terms of 'sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith [...] A ritual view is not directed towards the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs.'³³ Likewise, the liturgical-immediate dimension of listening is less about the usefulness of the sermon as about maintenance of the body of believers, practicing the faith we all share, and experiencing confessional unity.

In the preaching event the community expresses its faith and the individual listener is part of this larger body of 'being-church'. Preaching is embedded in a largely shared religious understanding of reality and the preaching event testifies to this commonality. David Lose speaks about preaching as a confessional

29. This fragment also illustrates the educational function of preaching. This lead is further pursued in the next section on the reflective dimension of listening.

30. For this idea, see further section 10.2.2 on the anamnestic sequence of actualising faith.

31. Cf. for the social dimensions of media enjoyment, B. E. Denham, 'Toward an Explication of Media Enjoyment. The Synergy of Social Norms, Viewing Situation, and Program Content', *Communication Theory*, 14 (2004):4.

32. D. McQuail and S. Windahl, *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication*. 2nd edition. (London: Longman, 1993), p. 54. See also D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. 4th edition. (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 53–54.

33. J. W. Carey, 'A Cultural Approach to Communication'. in: *Communication as Culture. Essays on Media and Society* (London: Routledge, 1989) as cited in McQuail and Windahl, *Communication Models*, p. 54.

speech act.³⁴ Confession, however, is not just the activity of the preacher but the liturgical dimension of listening acknowledges this confessional aspect of the preaching event from the perspective of listeners. Confession is a shared practice. It gives preaching a sense of catholicity, expressing the faith of the church, but this catholic quality is always locally embodied. Sermon-listening takes place in this congregation in this particular moment. The listener takes part in a particular tradition and his practice of listening is shaped by the community of faith. The liturgical dimension of listening reinforces the religious community. As such, preaching is partly the expression of a local community of faith.³⁵ For homiletic discourse this implies that the notion ‘congregational theology’—namely the idea that congregations have their own ‘theology’ grounded in their local traditions, religious history, cultural background, and spirituality—must be used descriptively rather than normatively. Sometimes congregational theology is spoken of pejoratively. Jeff Astley coined the notion ‘ordinary theology’ in order to indicate how theological activities are grounded in local communities and practices and how theology is done in everyday practices of believers.³⁶ Similarly, every act of preaching and listening constitutes a new confessional event and is an instance of local, ordinary theology.

Preachers may enhance this communal-ritual quality of the listening experience when they consciously tap into the reservoir of local theology and spirituality. It is not just ‘preaching what they want to hear’, but giving voice to what people believe and how faith in the practice of this local community may be embodied. When preachers touch upon communal religious ideas and spiritual interests of the local community they enhance the liturgical quality of the listening experience. Consciously introducing topics in the sermon, choosing a text to preach from, and presenting his religious self in the act of preaching, a preacher is aware of the liturgical dimension in listening. Even the course

34. D. J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ. Preaching in a Postmodern World*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

35. See L. Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Also Seters, A. van, editor, *Preaching as a Social Act. Theology & Practice*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988).

36. See J. Astley, *Ordinary Theology. Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*. (Ashgate, 2002). Interestingly, Reformed scholastic theology has a distinction that does justice to the reality that theology is not a series of authoritative texts nor the ultimate truth about God knowable by Him alone that theological knowledge resides in the individual believers. John Owen calls it ‘our theology’ (*theologia nostra*) and Turretin talks about ‘theology of humankind’. Cf. F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology. Volume 1: First to Tenth Topic. Transl. from the Latin by George Musgrave Giger. Edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. Original title: Institutio theologiae elencticae. Published in Geneva, 1688*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), pp. 3–4. S. Rehnman, *Divine Discourse. The Theological Methodology of John Owen*. (Baker Book House, 2002), pp. 69–71, and R. A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology. Second Edition. Volume One*. 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), pp. 260–269. Theology is always *theologia in subjecto*.

of the sermon, its construction and movement helps the listener in the ritual experience of listening.

The following interview-fragment illustrates how a certain movement in the sermon is essential for the listener:

I — What makes a sermon valuable to you?

Marc— I don't know [...] well, for a start it's important that they start normally, you know, understandably. And then that it moves to, let's say halfway the sermon, a warning.

I — From a simple start to a warning?

Marc— Yes, but the entire sermon must be simple and understandable. But you know, there is history. The history of a text or something in the text. But the sermon should not consist of history only. [...] the history is great, you know (*he invites his wife to explain his point further*)

Judith— You mean, that in the end it should be about that you have to love Christ and believe in Him. Those things. That Jesus emerges in the sermon as our Saviour.
(Marc and Judith)

Marc's remark that 'a sermon runs from 'history' to a 'warning' may be perceived as the wish of a listener who expects sermons in only one particular pattern without much variety or creative movement. It might even indicate a passive attitude on the part of the listener: each sermon is supposed to run the same route over and over again. Yet this negative assessment runs the risk of losing the main point this listener is making: he expresses how expecting a certain movement in the sermon helps him to become part of the event. It is like staying in a house you have are familiar with, to which you return to, and have the experience of 'being at home'. So listening is a communal experience and may include idiosyncrasies on the part of the audience that are 'not done' according to the state of art in homiletics that calls for creative variety in 'moves and structures'.³⁷ The liturgical attitude towards the listening experience also calls for a kind of preaching that fits the listening patterns of this local liturgical community.

The liturgical-immediate dimension of listening explains how the sermon and its various qualities shape the community of faith. It points to the ritual aspect of listening and explains how listeners 'feel at home' in the sermon.³⁸ In some sense, it is appropriate to call it 'sacramental' in which the preacher's words build an environment in which something happens that cannot be captured in terms of transmission of religious message. Words become a means for a phenomenal experience that in itself has religious characteristics. Though the

37. Cf. D. G. Buttrick, *Homiletic. Moves and Structures*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

38. See also section 11.3.

sermon presents another world, this ‘otherness’ exists in virtue of certain local religious hallmarks. Those marks facilitate the faith-experience of listeners that in belonging to the community of God they have something with God. It reminds us of Calvin’s image of the Word as ‘the mirror in which faith beholds God’.³⁹ In the sermon hearers recognize that ‘this is my faith, this is what I believe’.⁴⁰

7.5 FUNCTIONAL LISTENING: THE SITUATIONAL-REFLECTIVE ATTITUDE

The previous section demonstrated that the listening experience has intrinsic value. The listener dwells in the sermon with a liturgical-immediate attitude. Situational listening, however, points to an extra-sermonic value, namely the fact that the hearer use the sermon in view of his own life of faith. The listener also dwells in the sermon with a situational-reflective attitude. While liturgical-immediate listening refers to the ritual engagement of the listener with the preaching event, situational-reflective listening describes his cognitive or reflective engagement, and thus points to another aspect of listening as meditation:

It [viz. the sermon] causes me to think: it’s a kind of contemplation. That’s what happens to me individually, it’s a private thing. I have to figure it out myself before I express my faith to the outside world. It’s not because I feel ashamed, but because I have the feeling that I have to come to terms with it myself, personally. (Jonathan)

The listener reflects upon his own situation of faith in relation to the sermon and he reflects upon the sermon in connection to his own situation of faith. Hence, listening does not only occur as a ritual experience but also consists of a reflective interactivity between the sermon and the listener’s lived-faith. The reflective attitude towards the preaching event therefore relates to the situated receptivity in which the listener opens up for the sermon from his own faith-relationship with God and from his personal situation, as critical or trivial as it may seem.⁴¹

The listening experience thus includes a reflective resonance that occurs between a listener’s privately defined situation of faith and the sermon. This section presents two properties of this notion: (1) the extrinsic value of listening—the listener makes use the sermon; (2) and the situatedness of listening—the listener contextualises the sermon. Both using and contextualising indicate reflective activities on the part of the listener and demonstrate how listening takes place against the background of the listener’s defined situation of faith.

39. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by F.L. Battles. Edited by John T. McNeill. 1559th edition. (Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), Book III.ii.6.

40. See for the idea of ‘religious recognition’ section 9.2.

41. For situated receptivity, see above section 6.3.

7.5.1 Making use of the sermon

Listeners expect sermons to contain practical guidelines and to be applicable to their everyday lives. The interactive dynamic in which the listener dwells in the sermon and moves between the world of the sermon and his own personal lived faith thus comes with a specific understanding of what hearing sermons is all about: what use does it have for my own life of faith? In other words, what is the use of the sermon?⁴² Relevancy is a key-word since a relevant sermon brings about a reflective conversation with the listener's situatedness.⁴³

Making use of the sermon is evident when listeners report how they refer to or talk about a sermon in conversations with others, how the sermon helped them to have a religious conversation with a fellow-believer.

I like to recognize things in the sermon from everyday life. I like to learn from it. I visit elderly people. I have been an elder for some years, and now I have 12 people that I visit regularly, a couple of times a year. And many times we talk about the sermon. I visit people who don't go to church anymore and then you can refer to the sermon. Like: the minister said this and that.

(John)

In making use of the sermon, the defined situation of faith is taken as a starting point by the listener to single out elements of the sermon to make them useful:

Ronald — You must avoid that negativism takes over in your life. Actually, that means that you have to arm yourself against it. It also means that you have to protect yourself. And that's where faith comes in. Yes.

I — Does a sermon help you in this?

Ronald — Yes, when someone, well, one preacher is more gifted than another preacher, but in general, *I am able to pick out something; something that I think of, well let's take it with me.*

(Ronald)

Clearly, Ronald uses the sermon for his own goals. His listening behaviour portrays a reflective habit of picking out those things that help him to guard himself against all kinds of negativism in life. He almost has a private 'theology' that explains how he uses the sermon and how he is usually able to discern something that fits his theological aims. Importantly, this 'picking out' does not result in a set of theological ideas that he takes home. When asked what yesterday's sermon meant to him concerning this 'picking out', Ronald answered:

42. The manufacturing of the idea 'using the sermon' is methodically illustrated in section 5.2.4 (on instrumentalising the sermon) and section 5.4.1 (in its final form).

43. For topical relevancy see also 9.3.1.

Well, the hope, the joy and that very concrete reality of Pentecost: the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Really, wonderful! Yes, it gives you just that extra energy.

(Ronald)

Indeed, using the sermon for the personal life of faith in itself may be a very reflective activity in that the hearer is counting the evidence: what in this sermon is worth taking with me. Yet how reflective this may be, the actual experience is couched in very affective and emotional terms. Hope, joy, a 'feel good', or, wonderful and energetic experience. The immediacy in the language, which reminds us of the liturgical-immediate dimension of listening, is part of the larger framework of this individual listener: 'I am looking for 'material' in the sermon that enables me to prevent myself falling into negativism.' The fragment is thus a clear incident of how the liturgical and reflective attitudes work together in the listening experience.

For some listeners the listening experience is dominated by the situational-reflective attitude. They care less about the liturgical and corporate dimensions of dwelling in the sermon but hearing the sermon for them functions as a trigger to review one's own life of faith. The sermon is useful in view of the listener's situation of faith. The listener brings his own agenda to the act of listening; a purpose that is closely connected to her situation of faith. This might be an educational purpose ('I wish to learn new things from the bible'), an edifying purpose ('I wish to hear things I can use for my Sundayschool class'), a pastoral purpose ('I need guidance and comfort'), a parnetic purpose ('I want to hear about living a Christian life') or an emotional purpose ('I want to prevent myself to lapse into negativism'). Listeners use the sermon for their faith but this entails a variety of purposes. On the other hand, if the sermon fails to provide the hearers with 'material' in relation to their own life of faith then listening becomes a disappointing experience or the sermon may be rejected as too abstract or—the opposite—too judgmental. If the sermon is approached as a tool for faith in order to get hold of their own life of faith, or to develop new ideas about their situation of faith, or as a means to think about decisions to make, or to find reassurance or energy, or to figure out intricate theological issues that occur to them in the course of their daily lives, and the sermon fails to do the job, than dwelling in the sermon becomes very disappointing.

Hence the extrinsic value of the sermon primarily lies in the enactment of faith outside the liturgical space. The sermon is a means to be used for one's own situation of faith; less an event to be enjoyed as an element of worship. As the fragment from the interview with Ronald shows, enjoyment is not entirely lacking albeit closely related to the way in which Ronald is using the sermon in the light of his own situation of faith.

7.5.2 Contextualising the sermon

Listening is an intra-personal conversation between the listener's situation of faith and the sermon. This conversation represents an unique and contextual processing of the sermon by each individual listener.⁴⁴ In situational-reflective listening hearers relocate the sermon into the context of their own faith as it is lived. Contextualising the sermon, however, does not always succeed; take for instance the following incident:

The topic was difficult, about marriage and divorce. I was very interested in how he would explain the readings of the Scriptures. I can imagine that it is very hard for someone who is in such circumstance. No, I don't think of my personal situation, because it's not the situation I am in. So I sat there like, Lord what does this has to do with me? I mean, it is very difficult, isn't it? Suppose that you're in such a situation!

(Grace)

Despite the fact that Grace was not able to relate the sermon to her own situation, she nonetheless was doing some contextualising by trying to make sense of the sermon to herself as well as showing empathy with those who are indeed struggling with divorce and difficulties in marriage. If first-person contextualisation fails there is also the possibility of third-person contextualisation, which Grace's remark illustrates.

So hearers attempt to arrive at a personalised 'interpretation' of the sermon though this interpretation is not particularly first-person but could also be some sort of third-person understanding.⁴⁵ Hence this personal connection between sermon and lived-faith varies from listener to listener.⁴⁶ The sermon brings about a different resonance with the life of faith of the individual listener; the variety of resonances equals the variety of situations that account for how the individual hearers process the sermon. The listener engages in a conversation between sermon and lived faith and thus provides the sermon with a context, the context of his own life—or in the example above, the lives of others.

Compare for instance the differences between Caroline and Shana in contextualising the sermon. They belong to the same congregation and heard the same sermon. Regarding the confessional dimension of receptivity—their shared set of beliefs⁴⁷—they are remarkable similar yet their intra-personal conversation

44. On intra-personal conversation, see section 5.2.4.

45. The term 'interpretation' is used very loosely since it usually stimulates a whole apparatus of hermeneutical models and theory. The question whether listening is an hermeneutic act is addressed in section 8.1. The distinction between first- and third-person listening is further explored in section 9.4.

46. The conceptuality of 'personal connection' is discussed in section 9.1 when I address the process of identification in listening.

47. See above, section 6.4.

with the sermon is very different. Each of them provides the sermon with a different context. When we compare their situational-reflective behaviour the following two contextual aspects are important. First, Shana's situation is that of a very contested faith-relationship. She doubts whether she is included in God's salvific purposes and she is not sure about her own personal salvation. Though Caroline also has a very explicit understanding of the divine-human relationship in faith she does not worry about her salvation that much; her life of faith seems to be much less contested compared to Shana's. Second, Caroline's life is much more trivial⁴⁸ than Shana's who went through a severe crisis when her husband died a few months before the time of the interview. This critical period—as turns out in the interview—has strengthened the issue of uncertainty concerning her faith much more; it had been there before, but the intensity of her faith-worry has increased during this sad period.

These differences in their situation of faith play an important role in how Caroline's and Shana's respective conversations with the sermon develop. Caroline mentions that the Scriptural text on which the sermon was based was very powerful, but the sermon made her wonder what it meant for her practically. She expresses her disappointment when she concludes that 'I didn't understand it better than when I had read the text myself'. The conversation between Caroline and the text in view of her life was not helped by the sermon at all. Compare this with a similar but also very different account by Shana:

It made me miserable. Yes, indeed. Although yesterday I thought, the sermon itself was not very depressing at all. No. [...] But then I wonder, why did it make me so miserable? Why, well, that's probably just because of myself. [...] He [the preacher] was so clear on the fact that it had been Easter. That's a miracle, don't you think? He is risen. He died, well if you die as a parent for your child, okay, but He died for sinners who really messed up. That's great, isn't it? It shouldn't make you feel miserable. I mean, that's my problem, isn't it, just how I felt at the moment. (Shana)

The two listeners agree that the sermon was quite difficult to understand; both report a functional listening experience: what does the sermon do in relation to my own life. For Shana this personal connection—or actually the lack of it—is much more existentially loaded. Her language is more emotional; she reveals an inner struggle in coming to terms with the sermon. Caroline's response is more cognitive. Yet it also reveals how she attempted to contextualise the sermon; without much success though. The two responses indicate how, in the intra-personal conversation between listener and sermon, the sermon is contextualised, either in the framework of the rather general question 'what does

48. Note that 'triviality' is put against critical situations in life. Hence this does not entail an evaluative judgement. See for the conceptualisation above 6.3.

it matter for my actual life' (Caroline) or in the framework of a suffering mind 'it doesn't touch me; it's probably because of my own situation'. Both incidents show that listeners contextualise the sermon in a conversation between their own life of faith and what is presented in the sermon—regardless the fact that the sermon was not very succesful for them in terms of understanding and identification (see below, section 8.2 and 9.1).

Therefore, central in contextualising the sermon is the situation of the listener. In Kathy's story we find a fine example of this aspect of contextualising the sermon. She told how she and her husband went through a severe crisis in their marriage. In that critical period their pastor delivered a reassuring and comforting sermon. A few months ago it seemed that everything would turn out all right. But things have gone worse and at this moment she stands on the brink of a divorce. Kathy's conversation with the sermon would be very different from what it had been before. So how did Kathy contextualise the sermon the first time? And what conversation would emerge when she would listen to the sermon in her current situation? How did she engage with the sermon the first time?

Kathy— Well, that God is with you. That he is able to produce something that you cannot arrange yourself. You cannot even see it. Yes, that was very special in the sermon.

I — So that's why you said [previously in the interview] that you would like to listen to that sermon again?

Kathy— Yes, because now you're at the point of moving on alone [i.e. without her husband] [...] I wonder what things I might hear in the sermon when I would listen to it now.

I — Like what meaning does the expression: 'I make all things new' [i.e. the text of the sermon] have today?

Kathy— Yes, or 'I make a new beginning'. Your whole life is actually just like one large big black, I mean really large big black hole [...] Yes. And what I actually have to decide. I have to decide now whether we have to split up, don't I? [...] Do I have to let him go? Do I have to accept anger because of everything he did to us? I find that very difficult. (Kathy)

This fragment illustrates the idea of 'secondary listening'.⁴⁹ When she listened to the sermon three months ago, she felt confirmed; the sermon arose a deep sense of trust. During the time of the interview, however, she tells that the same sermon would question her faith deeply. First, she listened to the sermon as if God reassured her to continue, to keep going. Now she wonders whether it would

49. The conceptual idea of 'secondary listening' has not been saturated; it was discovered in articulating the various features of sermon-listening-incidents. See above, section 4.2.2.

be something like ‘a new beginning.’ Her current situation is totally different compared to three months ago; the choices she faces and the challenges she meets today have changed completely. The sermon would sound rather confronting to her in stead of its confirming sound at the first time. Contextualising is thus very much connected to the situated receptivity of the hearer. The examples mentioned above are too incidental to demonstrate that the situation of the hearer explains much of the diversity in listening among members of the same audience. Yet they help to understand that the same listener hears the same sermon in a different way one day or another. Contextualising the sermon entails that the same listener enters into a unique conversation with the sermon every time she hears the very same sermon again.

Functional listening is thus indicated by two aspects. First, in hearing the sermon listeners wonder how the sermon relate to their own lives of faith. This contextualising takes place as an intra-personal conversation within the listening mind. Secondly, the meditative environment of the sermon is used by the listener to acquire answers to questions, to find comfort in distress or to receive guidance in a difficult situation. Hearers make use of the sermon in view of their own situation and in hearing the sermon they attempt to put the sermon into the context of their own lives of faith. The wish for practical sermons indicates this functional attitude towards preaching. Disappointment with preaching may come from the hearer’s inability to make use of the sermon or to contextualise the sermon in their own situations; even worse: when hearers lack a strong sense of belonging to the community of faith⁵⁰, they will also lack third-person contextualisations.⁵¹

While the liturgical dimension of listening indicates that listening is a collective and communal practice and that it connects with the communal receptivity of the hearer, the reflective dimension focusses upon the diversity and plurality of the listening audience due to the hearer’s situated receptivity. ‘People respond to sermons in as many ways as there are numbers of people. One preacher – so many different kinds of listeners’, as the researchers of the ‘Listening to Listeners’ project conclude.⁵² McClure talks about ‘heterodoxy of listening’ when he discusses the implications of reception research for preaching.⁵³ What does this diversity or plurality amount to? Obviously, audience plurality concerns social, psychological, educational, cultural, sexual, and racial aspects.⁵⁴ On the

50. See above, section 6.4.

51. For third-person engagement, see section 9.4.2.

52. M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), p. 195.

53. J. S. McClure, ‘The Practice of Sermon Listening,’ *Congregations*, 32 (2006):1, p. 9.

54. See also L. L. Hogan, *Graceful Speech. An Invitation to Preaching*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 69–86.

other hand, however, we have to ask whether the main concern of listeners in dwelling in the sermon concerns either of these complex notions. The various aspects of human life certainly influence the way people listen to sermons.⁵⁵ As opposed to these aspects, however, the listener's situation of faith is central in the situational-reflective experience of listening. More precisely, audience plurality and the individuality or contextuality of the listener in the actual course of listening predominantly exists in the reflective movement between his own situation of faith and the world of the sermon. In fact, how this situation of faith is shaped culturally, psychologically or socially, is secondary.

55. For the psychological impact, see Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God*.

8

PERCEIVING THE SERMON

Dwelling in the sermon, part 2: religious realities

8.1 ARE LISTENERS INTERPRETERS?

Well, yes I think there is a message. Yes. But I think if you would really hear something from God directly than you wouldn't have to [...] you know, instead [with the sermon] you have to interpret yourself. Of course. It's like that service a while ago, about 'everything will become new' or 'he [God] makes a new thing', then you start working on it yourself. The thing you would like to do most is to fill in the blanks in stead of waiting for what God wants to do. (Kathy)

Expressions like 'you have to interpret yourself' and 'you start working on it' confirm the general idea in contemporary homiletics that listening is a form of interpretation. Since listeners try to make sense of the sermon, understanding is at the heart of the process of reception; listeners are therefore, so the argument runs, engaged in an interpretative practice. Due to the prominent place hermeneutics has acquired in virtually all theological disciplines during the twentieth century, this interest in the hermeneutic activity of listeners is hardly surprising. Theology deals with authoritative texts. These texts are understood, interpreted and rendered in the present; activities that require interpretative rules and methods. The preaching event became an extension of this hermeneutical practice: preachers interpret the Bible and listeners interpret the sermon.¹ Gradually, the construction of meaning has become the dominant category to frame the act of listening.

'Understanding' is an important process in sermon reception but we have to carefully distinguish between listening and interpreting. Hermeneutics is the

1. G. D. J. Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders. Hermeneutische homiletiek*. (Kampen: Kok, 1991); I. Reuter, *Predigt Verstehen. Grundlagen einer homiletischen Hermeneutik*. Volume 17, *Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie*. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

discipline of the conscious and skilled application of rules and methods for interpretation. Preachers have acquired these skills. They are able to professionally distinguish between the ancient text and the contemporary world. They have learned to master rules for interpretation and they engage in hermeneutical activities as part of their trained profession. Listeners, however, do not have access to an interpretative practice consisting of hermeneutical rules and exegetical methods. Besides this lack of a general hermeneutic ‘competency’, three additional features of hearing support the reluctance to apply hermeneutics as overall framework: (1) listening takes place as actual discourse; (2) listening has a certain aboutness; and (3) listening is foremost an act of perception. Since this chapter argues that listening is primarily a perceptive process and only secondarily part of an interpretative practice, it is important to highlight these differences between interpretation and listening beforehand.

First, listening takes place in an actual discourse situation. In the interviews listeners address issues like diction, seating, emotional climate of the service, the length of the sermon, its intelligibility, and the preacher’s performance. These are typical aspects of the actual context of discourse.² Being part of a real-time discourse event, listening is not like reading, unlike some writers have suggested. Those who explain the practice of listening in terms of Iser’s influential book *The Act of Reading* neglect the basic distinction between orality and literacy.³ Walter J. Ong has pointed out that living speech features a special psychodynamics compared to reading.⁴ Due to sound and the human auditory sensorium, Ong argues, ‘spoken word does have more power than the written to do what the word is meant to do, to communicate.’ He explains how writing and reading depends on particular complex transactions of the human mind, while

the spoken word is part of present actuality and merges with a total situation to convey meaning [italics TP]. Context for the spoken word is furnished ready-made. In written performance the writer must establish both meaning and context. This is one of the most difficult tasks in communication simply because the person or persons being communicated with are not *there* [italics original] at all: the writer has to project them totally out of his own imagination. And they themselves, the readers, have to learn the game of literacy: how to conform to the other’s projection, or at least operate in terms of it.⁵

2. For discourse as sensitizing concept, see section 2.4.1 and 3.5.

3. W. Iser, *Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins U.P., 1978). Other formative and much cited texts are U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1980).

4. For literacy and orality, see Walter J. Ong in several publications: W. J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word. Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967); W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*. 2nd edition. (London: Routledge, 2002).

5. Ong, *Presence of the Word*, pp. 116–117. Ong frames the history of communication rather

Any theory of sermon reception has to acknowledge its orality.⁶ Consequently, section 8.4 deals with issues regarding the *concentration* of the listener in hearing the sermon, in which the discourse situation of listening is exemplified.

Secondly, listening has a certain ‘aboutness’. Listeners interact with what the sermon is about—as they perceive it. In the hermeneutic paradigm ‘content’ does not exist and if it does it is subsumed under the interpretative relationship between preacher and listener. For instance, when he discusses the elements of an audience-oriented homiletics, Dannowski first deals with the relationship-substance dimension⁷ and Dingemans reframes the act of listening in terms of Gadamer and Ricoeur.⁸ From his own ‘Vorverständnis’ a preacher encodes *his* relation with the text and God through the sermon in symbols and language, while the listener decodes the sermon from his own frame of reference and language.⁹ Though according to Dingemans we only need some overlap between the various symbolic systems, he does not point out how this overlap could exist.¹⁰ In the interviews though listeners are very much concerned with the question what the sermon addresses, what it is about, and what issues are dealt with in the sermon. Sermons have aboutness, they present realities. In the act of listening these realities are foremost perceived in their *religious* quality. So section 8.3 addresses the various realities that make up the aboutness of the sermon from the perspective of the listener.

Finally, listening is primarily an act of perception.¹¹ Interpretation is a very complex act of explanation as John Searle points out. ‘The use of this word [viz., interpretation] suggests that there is an act of interpreting whenever we understand something or perceive something [...] We normally just see an object or understand a sentence, without any *act* of interpreting.’ Following Wittgenstein, Searle proposes to ‘reserve the word “interpretation” for cases where we actually perform a conscious and deliberate act of interpreting, for

pejoratively when he describes the second stage (alphabet and print) in the development from oral to written culture as ‘denaturated word’, see Ong, *Presence of the Word*, pp. 35ff.

6. Cf. P. S. Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 37–60.

7. H. W. Dannowski, *Kompendium der Predigtlehre*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985), pp. 107–109.

8. Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders*, pp. 74–83.

9. In fact, Dingemans’ model is rather idiosyncratic as may be illustrated from the mixture of hermeneutics with the model of encoding and decoding that belongs to critical communication theories such as Stuart Hall’s, cf. S. Hall, ‘Encoding/decoding’ in: S. Hall et al., editors, *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79*. (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

10. Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders*, pp. 146–152.

11. On listening and sense-perception in relation to sermon-reception, see also C. Bunniers, ‘Die Hörer’ in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlag, 1990), pp. 140–141.

example, where we substitute one expression for another.’¹² In the mode of functional listening¹³ listeners consciously wonder what this sermon might imply for their own lives, how they have to act according to the Scriptures presented in the sermon, or what the sermon might mean in their situation of faith. These operations are typically interpretative. In those cases hearers indeed substitute expressions from the sermon for those relating to their own life of faith. This important interpretative activity on the part of the listener, however, does not turn listening into a hermeneutical enterprise in which meaning and understanding are primary. It underlines the fact that first there is perception (what the sermon is about) and subsequently there is interpretation (what it might mean in my situation). Perception shapes *attentive involvement* as we will see in section 8.2.

So in hearing the sermon listeners try to make sense of the sermon. ‘Normal perceptual experience is shot through with “interpretation”, as Alston observes. Perception is the primary category here. Alston makes an important distinction between perception and interpretation. He rejects the view that ‘to perceive a house *is* to interpret our experience as manifesting a house, or to take what is experienced as being a house.’ This is due to the nature of awareness:

Nevertheless, what makes this a matter of perceiving the house, rather than just thinking about it or remembering it, is the fact of *presentation, givenness*, the fact that something is presented to consciousness, is something of which I am *directly aware*. And this is something that is distinguishable from any elements of conceptualisation, judgment, belief, or other forms of “interpretation”, however rarely the former may be found without the latter in adult experience.¹⁴

In listening, the hearer *perceives* the world of the sermon, he becomes aware of the religious realities presented in the world of the sermon. A respondent in this study illustrates how this works. During the interview he grabs his bible and starts reading a passage from the Scripture, taken from Hebrews. He continues by talking about what the preacher said about the passage:

Now I talk about it, I think yes, he said a lot more. [...] Jesus as High Priest. O yes, *every high priest acts on behalf of man to bring gifts and sacrifices to God because of sin. Christ likewise did gave himself the honour to become high priest. Yet while he was the son, he learnt to obey [...] So he became cause of eternal salvation* [here ends the reading from Hebrews] He [i.e. the preacher] gave a

12. J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 134. See also J. R. Searle, *Mind. A Brief Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 179–191.

13. See further above, section 7.5.

14. W. P. Alston, *Perceiving God. The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. (Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 27–28. *Emphasis* original.

splendid explanation. When he began, that example that you recognize yourself when he started with that suffering person. And then that there is another way to arrive at salvation; that Jesus thus obeyed his Father and by obeying he fulfilled everything. Though he had the possibility to go another journey!
(John)

Does this report rely on an *act* of interpretation? Does this listener employ some sort of hermeneutic process to make sense of the sermon? Certainly, there is selecting: he favoured this part of the sermon instead of that part; there is filtering: he may have missed some parts of the sermon and was more aware of other parts; there might even be misunderstanding: he did not correctly reported the preacher's locutions, not to mention his illocutions. Yet these aspects do not necessarily entail that listening is primarily an act of interpretation on the part of the listener. Every act of perception entails distortions. Misperceptions usually comes with perception. In fact, John did not accurately enough reconstruct the precise wordings of the preacher; even worse, he may have distorted what the preacher actually said. Yet he talks about what was presented to him in the sermon. He became aware of the reality of Christ's sacrificial death and its implications for his own dealing with suffering. John does not talk about his interpretation of the sermon, he reports his perception. Because of the staged situation of an interview the listener reports what he remembers at that moment. The point, however, remains the same: he reports a memory concerning his perception of what had been presented by the preacher, the 'givenness' in the sermonic world and how he became aware of that.

8.2 PERCEPTION AS ATTENTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Perception, according to Dahm, is the second stage in listening, the stage in which the listener selects signals to deal with and in which selection is a mechanism of perception. The listener's wish for affirmation of already existing beliefs, the release of cognitive tensions, and the image of the preacher influence how selection takes place.¹⁵ The perception of the sermon has also been studied from the perspective of speech-act theory as part of the larger project 'Predigen und

15. K. W. Dahm, 'Hören und Verstehen. Kommunikationssoziologische Überlegungen zur gegenwärtigen Predigtnot', in: A. Beutel, editor, *Homiletisches Lesebuch: Texte zur heutigen Predigtlehre*. (Tübingen: Katzmann, 1989), pp. 249–251 Cf. also J. G. M. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders. Sociologische exploratie onder katholieke kerkgangers in de Bondsrepubliek Duitsland*. (Nijmegen: Instituut voor toegepaste sociologie, 1975). Dahm systematizes the listening process in a way that reminds of Maletzke's model of mass-communication. See for the latter, D. McQuail and S. Windahl, *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication*. 2nd edition. (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 46–53. Dahm's model became very influential in homiletical literature, see for instance also G. Otto, *Predigt als rhetorische Aufgabe. Homiletische Perspektiven*. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987).

Hören'. The researchers compared the analysis of sermons with the types of speech acts that the listeners perceived. What kind of speech act did the listeners perceive? And how does their perception relate to an 'expert-analysis' of the speech acts in the sermon? Dahm is particularly interested in how perception takes place in terms of a selection-process; Lukatis and Daiber on the other hand study perception from the point of view of the illocutionary object of perception. Both perspectives present valuable aspects that shed light on what takes place in perception. Yet both are too much preoccupied with the question whether the listener perceives the sermon correctly.

The listeners in this study, however, point to another direction. In hearing listeners are focussed on 'what the sermon is about'. Grace, for instance, tells that her preacher introduces the topic for the sermon in the weekly Church magazine. She adds to this: 'then you know what the sermon is about, but you do not know what he is going to say about it'—that is for the sermon to reveal.

Last week he preached on anger. You feel something like: what will it be about? You know certain passages from the bible about anger, a year ago he preached from Galatians, but you listen like, what is he going to say about it? [...] This week he preached on marriage and divorce. It's in the Bible but I find it a very difficult topic. Not personally, because I am not in a situation of divorce, but you know, it's really a very difficult topic. (Grace)

Others tell how, after the children have left the building, they prepare for the sermon and for 'what the preacher is going to say'. Thus central for perception is attention, and as William James puts it 'everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought.'¹⁶ Attention is object-related as it is attention *of something*. Inherent in James phenomenological characterisation is that in the human mind more than one object calls for attention.¹⁷ Attention is the favouring of a certain object at the (temporary) expense of other possible objects. Loosing attention then is the wandering away of this favourite object, captured attention is an intense 'taking possession' of the chosen object.¹⁸

16. W. James, *Principles of Psychology. Volume One*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1890/1950), pp. 403–404.

17. For a phenomenological description of the varieties of attention, such as objects of sense, ideas, derived, and voluntary to name few, see *Ibid.*, pp. 416–424.

18. In neuro-psychological studies, 'attention capture', however, is used 'when attention is diverted away from a primary goal by an irrelevant or unexpected event', see S. B. Most and D. J. Simons, 'Attention Capture, Orienting, and Awareness', in: C. Folk and B. Gibson, editors, *Attraction, Distraction, and Action. Multiple Perspectives on Attentional Capture*. (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2001), p. 151.

In hearing listeners become orientated towards a reality. Sermons may present realities, testify to them, or even try to persuade listeners of their truth. But beyond these illocutionary functions of presenting and persuading, there is a phenomenon that is more fundamental. Attention is more relevant to consider in sermon reception than the mechanisms that explain selection in the process of communication (Dahm) or the ability of hearers to reconstruct the 'correct' speech acts (Lukatis/Daiber).¹⁹ Contemporary psychological research on attention predominantly concerns *visual* perception since the core idea of 'selective attention' was basically researched using experiments with visual stimuli.²⁰ In philosophical literature on mind and language, visual perception is also the paradigm in which attention is explained:

For example, in fixing eyes on an object, i.e. *in perceiving*, the perceiver depicts it from the field of his perception. He brings the object into the foreground and perceives it against the background of other things. From that moment on, the object becomes the focus of attention.²¹

According to Marková 'making distinctions' is an essential capacity of all living beings. We distinguish between 'us' and 'them', between light and dark, red and green, between danger and security, veracity and deceit, good and evil. As making distinctions is essential for living, for humans it is 'also essential for thinking and communication.'²² Processes such as perception, thinking, feeling and knowing have their origin in the human capacity of making distinctions.

In the preaching event something similar happens. The listener distinguishes between different objects that 'possess' his mind. The set of objects obviously is very diverse. All kinds of objects occupy the thoughts and feelings of listeners, ranging from everyday trivialities to intricate problematic situations. Listeners report about the struggle to concentrate and to have their attention focussed on the sermon. Some tell that they had a hard time to take their mind off from their everyday life and listen attentively; others talk about a wandering mind because the sermon did not focus them on one particular object. One listener takes notes during the sermon, to keep track of what the preacher is talking about or to keep herself from wandering away from the sermon.

19. Selective attention is an important concept in cognitive science and neuropsychology, see D. LaBerge, *Attentional Processing. The Brain's Art of Mindfulness*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 19–46. For an overview of the early studies in selective attention, see E. A. Styles, *The Psychology of Attention*. (Hove, East Sussex: Psychology Press, 1997).

20. Styles, *Psychology of Attention*, pp. 33–60. For early models on selective attention, see N. Moray, *Listening and Attention*. (Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 34–41, 83–94.

21. I. Marková, *Dialogicity and Social Representations. The Dynamics of Mind*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 26.

22. Ibid.

This 'aboutness' of the sermon concerns referential quality of the preaching event. Hearers say that the sermon made them think about something or that the ideas expressed by the preacher pleased them. These useful or pleasurable cognitive flourishing of the listener during the preaching event has an important property. In listening to the sermon the listener's mind is directed towards a religious reality. In other words: the listener becomes orientated towards the presence of God and the reality of Christ.²³ Even if this presence and reality is particularly problematic and listeners feel abandoned by God or they find themselves in a situation of questioned faith. In either way does the sermon direct the mind of the listener towards a religious reality. How clear or obscure, vivid or vague this might be, the sermon arouses *religious* attention. It simply makes people think about God, his involvement in our human condition, his future kingdom, his promises, about how we stand in relation to Him and the dynamic activity of his Spirit. The sermon religiously directs the mind of the listeners towards Christ and it makes people wonder what good news it is, that is being proclaimed.²⁴

I think at that moment (viz., while listening) Jesus tries to [...] let you know something and that it's up to me whether I receive it or not. Not to Him, that's up to me. Well, yes, I think he makes himself clear all the time, but we have to be open; that's what happens in preaching as well. Concentration. That's what our minister tells us too. You shouldn't have too much on your mind, because then attention is lessened. [...] The more I concentrate myself, the more I sense that Jesus occupies himself with me, trying to pass on a message. That's why you are there. Because he would like to keep in touch with you, and you yourself like it too.

(Deborah)

Listening is religion in practice. The hearer makes distinctions in the act of sermon-listening and he does so in relation to realities of faith. Deborah speaks about taking her mind off those things that bother her and directing her mind towards what God has to say. 'Christ who occupies himself with the listener and passes on a message', as the Deborah puts it. Realities that somehow are related to God, and the listener's answerability towards God. From the listener's point of view social representation in the preaching event subsumed under the category of religious representation. Thus, in the act of listening the attention of the listener is not just focussed upon a socially constructed object, co-authored by preacher and listener. Of course, listeners communicate with the preacher.

23. The concept of 'orienting' also functions in cognitive psychology. Shortly, 'the gateway to attention'. See Lang, Peter, J., Simons, R. F. and Balaban, M., editors, *Attention and Orienting. Sensory and Motivational Processes*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), p. xix.

24. The issue of referentiality and language is very complex. Cf. R. Stalnaker, 'Reference and necessity'. in: B. Hale and C. Wright, editors, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

Yet this is not the primary structure. In listening the hearer focusses upon a religious reality.

The central questions in the act of listening then become: what kind of reality is being represented, what kind of answerability is shaped in listening, and what sort of objects is the human mind directed to in the situation of dialogicity?

8.3 RELIGIOUS REALITIES IN THE WORLD OF THE SERMON

8.3.1 The illocutionary world of the sermon

Even those who highly value the preacher's authority in issues of faith ultimately face God rather than a fellow human being.²⁵ They put the words of the preacher into this perspective. Eventually, not the intentions of the preacher but how the listener perceives 'religion' in the sermon is what counts. Listeners do not feel obliged to share the preacher's words because they are his. They rather use the preacher's opinion to shape their own thoughts about God, salvation, their life of faith. In the act of preaching faith and its orientation is at stake and the direction of faith does not concern the thoughts and utterances of the preacher.

The preacher is just a human being. I see the preacher as someone who brings a message, a translation of what God inspires him to speak to us. I am not saying that he is super-human, but he needs to give a translation of the message. [...] I hate to be distracted by personal opinions. (Ronald)

The preacher said that Jesus was very radical on certain issues, so he had to preach it like it was in the bible. He cannot keep away things or make them feel less problematic. He really said that, 'Jesus said it, so I have to say it'. Yes, it was quite hard, but the minister had to talk about it because the Scriptures give certain regulations and commands. (Grace)

These listeners are very much aware that the realities that are addressed in the sermon are not so much the preacher's interests but represent a higher authority. However, this does not entail that the preacher's words do not count at all. The listener engages in a preacher-induced conversation with the realities of the gospel, the kingdom of God and the claims of Christ. The sermon creates a world in which this conversation takes place. Listeners may agree or disagree with the preacher, their thoughts may converge or diverge. Yet in speaking, the preacher creates an area or domain of meaning, a world that invites the listener

25. Probably, we find a particular protestant emphasis here. Believers in an episcopalian tradition—including the Orthodox strands of Christianity—find themselves in a corporate body and less as 'solitary believers'. See for contemporary descriptions of these types of Christianity, C. Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002).

to become part of, to enjoy or to benefit from in relation to her own situation of faith. The hearer dwells in the sermon and perceives various religious realities. These realities may be understood as parts of a larger illocutionary world of the sermon.

The idea of the 'illocution' helps to explain the listener's direction of mind. The notion of the illocution is used in speech act theories to distinguish between utterances on the one hand and the performative aspect of language in use on the other hand. To speak is to *do* something.²⁶ This element from the speech-act vocabulary helps to do justice to what listeners report—as they go beyond the interhuman dimension of the preacher's words and point to how the sermon directs their minds to the reality of faith. Listeners dwell in certain *illocutionary area's* of the sermon.²⁷ In other words, the world of the sermon consists of various illocutionary areas that are perceived by the listener.²⁸

An illocutionary area concerns the shaping of the faith-direction of the listener's mind in relation to the 'aboutness' of the sermon. In general, preaching as God-talk is speech about God or, better, of God.²⁹ Yet God-talk in preaching appears to listeners in three different illocutionary areas. In their reports on dwelling in the sermon, hearers tell what the sermon was about, what it meant to them, what themes and topics were addressed, what issues of faith were raised. Whether the sermon presented the Christ-event in its fullness and uniqueness or whether the sermon was close to everyday life with its struggles and joys. They talk about how the preacher explained the biblical text, how he presented the story of faith in contemporary terms or how the truth of the gospel was presented in the sermon. Some listeners very much like the preacher to address the contemporary world in order to enable the congregation to shape a faithful opinion on matters in society and politics. Others stressed the insights they were given in a detailed explanation of the text. Another listener tells about how he enjoyed listening to the sermon in which the preacher stressed the importance of forgiveness of sins and conversion.

In these reports on perceiving certain realities in the sermon, three basic illocutionary area's may be distinguished. These areas stand for different orien-

26. Speech act theorists developed different taxonomies of speech acts. For two influential proposals see J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An essay in the philosophy of language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) and W. P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*. (Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press, 2000). Cf. the sensitizing concept developed in section 2.4.

27. See the memo on page 141, about the integration of existing theory and empirical incidents in formulating the idea concerning 'illocutionary area's'.

28. On the world of sermon, see A. Grözinger, *Homiletik. Lehrbuch Praktische Theologie*. (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), pp. 157–176.

29. For a recent overview of homiletical views on God-talk in the sermon, see R. Knieling, *Was predigen wir? Eine Homiletik*. (Neukirchener Verlag, 2009).

tations that are shaped in the listener's mind according to their reports on the aboutness of the sermon. In other words, dwelling in various illocutionary areas in the sermon leads to various kinds of attentiveness. First, there is kerugmatic attentiveness on the part of the listener, when he perceives the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ (section 8.3.3). Secondly, there is a life-world or actual attentiveness, when dwelling in the sermon makes the listener perceive realities that connect to his everyday human existence (section 8.3.2). Finally, dwelling in the sermon leads also to attention towards the Scriptures, a textual attentiveness (section 8.3.4).

8.3.2 Life-world attentiveness

Many listeners state somewhere in the interview that the sermon must be about their actual life, at least have some connection with it. The fact itself may be evident, how it works out though is rather intriguing because it contains all kinds of contradictions. For instance, some listeners expect the preacher to take a stand towards a certain political topic; others however vehemently oppose the idea that a preacher brings his own (political) views into the pulpit. The fact remains that the actual world should be part of the sermon. This is not only a deep wish by listeners but an assumption for all homiletical activity. Therefore, when listeners dwell in the sermon they encounter realities that are connected with, that make them think of, or are clear references to their actual life-world. Three aspects are relevant here. The life-world attentiveness of listeners has a moral qualification, it concerns the human condition, and is put in the larger framework of the coming of God's Kingdom.

First, the everyday world realities are perceived as *morally qualified*. The contemporary world is perceived religiously in its badness or goodness. The references to the actual situation of the hearer do not just connect the sermon to today's world, they shape a religious opinion, express a religious value judgement, helps to perceive deeper layers of religiosity in today's world or unmask contemporary idols. Hearers dwell in the sermon and perceive actual realities as 'values', both positively and negatively. They do not function as mere illustrations of truth nor as images to vividly present the text³⁰ but the listener perceives these realities insofar they belong to their everyday existence. These realities are religiously laden for the listener.

30. See for instance in Chappell's classical sermon structure of explanation, illustration and application: B. Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching. Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), pp. 163–198. Cf. also H. W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching. The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 137–155.

Ronald and Deborah belong to the same congregation. On the one hand, Deborah wants the preacher to take a stand on burning issues such as animal rights and the environment. She very much stresses the need that in the sermon the church should take a position publicly. On the other hand, Ronald is very reluctant about the appearance of political issues. According to him, the presence of the contemporary world in the sermon should be rather opaque. Chaos must not be named too specific otherwise it threatens the believer's faith too much. Besides this obvious difference, the similarity in their approach is that in dwelling in the sermon the listener perceives realities that make them aware that everyday life have a moral quality. Life should be handled from a perspective of faith. As the example shows, some listeners need a very concrete treatment of controversial topics in the pulpit; others fear that too much concreteness might harm the listeners freedom to handle life subjectively and responsibly. Central however is that preaching must contain references to the actual world that are morally loaden to enable listeners to master the world and to handle it religiously.³¹

Further, in life-world realities *the human condition* is present in the sermon. It is important for listeners to feel that their lives religiously matter. The sermon addresses the controversial, the things that stirr the congregation in their everyday existence or names the usual, the things relevant for faith as it is daily lived. These actualities appear in the sermon and concern the entire congregation or segments of it, such as the youth. 'Great when you have a very actual sermon. Actual for everyone, even for the youth', as one listener puts it. When hearers functionally listen³² they talk about how the sermon makes them think about their lives in order to act more in line with the Christian faith. It is called 'practical' when the sermon makes them think about significant areas in their lived-faith. 'It's important', one listener says

for your family-life, for raising your kids, but also for your daily work. It helps you to translate situations from God's Word to practical situations in your life, so that you can act accordingly. (Eric)

In the sermon the listener's mind is directed to the actual world of faith as it is lived. The sermon points listeners towards their own situation of faith, helps to define their situation of faith, or challenges them to review their lived-faith. The illocutionary area of actuality in the sermon provides the listeners with a place to reflect upon their lives *coram Deo* and to wonder what implications the preached Word might have upon the practicalities of their lives.

31. For listeners reactions to controversial topics in the pulpit, see further M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), pp. 91–110.

32. About functional listening, see 7.5.

Finally, life-world realities are perceived by the listener as part of a larger *eschatological framework*. Everyday realities naturally belong to ‘this world’ and ‘the here and now’. In listening hearers become aware that they are placed in the larger context of the kingdom of God. For instance, Eric tells how important it is that raising your kids religiously should be a topic in preaching. He is not looking for the latest pedagogical insights although he wants guidance on how children are raised in Christian families in order to serve Christ as faithful believers in the pilgrimage of life. Thus the life-world attentiveness of listeners is shaped when they perceive realities that connect them to their human condition. These realities are thus part of a transcending structure. This structure is particularly evident when the sermon deals with death and other kinds of evil in human existence. Dwelling in a sermon opens a perspective that lies beyond the here and now. Since the death of her husband, Shana has been very sensitive when death is mentioned in the sermon. ‘Today it’s him, tomorrow it can be me’, she says. When dying and death as life-world realities are perceived in the sermon, they become part of a much broader religious framework that goes beyond the here-and-now.³³

8.3.3 Kerugmatic attentiveness

In dwelling in the sermon the listener perceives elements that belong to his life-world. There is, however, a kind of reality that does not belong the hearer’s everyday life, which he nonetheless perceives in hearing the sermon. The field of salvation is about God’s grace and his redemptive acting in Christ, and concerns the various elements of the gospel. In perceiving the sermon the listener develops a *kerugmatic attentiveness* because these realities direct the hearer’s mind in some broad sense to the ‘Christ-event’.

In homiletic literature the kerugmatic dimension is usually phrased in terms of proclamation. It is primarily associated with the encounter with Christ in preaching but in real preaching the realities concerning the Christ-event feature a subtle variety. The kerugmatic illocutionary area shows a ‘proclamatory scale’ that ranges from the call to repent and believe Christ on the one end to a communal expression of the gospel on the other. This proclamatory range could be conceptualised according to the level of authority in the relationship between preacher and listener. The realities concerning salvation, such as forgiveness, grace, and God’s redemptive promises, can be preached from a position *opposite* to the listener, they can be expressed as corporate public confession *on behalf* of the listener, or they can be presented *to* the hearer as ‘something’ to relate to.

On the very one end of the scale we find a preacher who confronts the congregation with a *call to believe Christ*. Some listeners are rather outspoken

33. In section 10.3 I return to this eschatological aspect in more depth.

by saying that every sermon should contain such a call to repent and a summon to believe. The reality of Christ forces the hearer to take a stand towards the good news of Jesus Christ. One listener phrases it quite decisively:

The message of Easter was obvious. The resurrection and return of Christ. With an emphasis upon: if that would not have been happened, we would be lost for ever. This he [the preacher] puts forward very well. Every time though its a process of learning. Listen, every human being tends to walk away. The sermon is a kind of lead to draw you into the right track. [...] It's through the sermon that Christ calls you back. (Eric)

The reality perceived is that of Christ's death and resurrection, not neutrally but with urgency. For Eric dwelling in the sermon is to encounter realities that represent a call to return to the right track, back to God's road of salvation. The Christ-event is not something to be confirmed in the sermon but constitutes a confronting message.³⁴

At the very other end of the 'proclamatory scale' the preacher *expresses the Christ-event* and thus acts on behalf of the community of faith. For the hearer, dwelling in the sermon means perceiving realities concerning Christ in such a way that they confirm the listener's faith and make the listener feel at home in the world of the gospel the preacher speaks of, regardless the listener's mood:

Well, those Easter overtones in the sermon, it's a miracle, isn't it? He is risen! He died, yes—if you would die as a parent for your child, but he died for sinners. People who totally bungled. That's great, isn't it? That's not supposed to make you feel miserable. That's your own problem, how you feel at that moment. That's not the problem of the sermon. Really not. (Shana)

What does this fragment tell us? The hearer struggles with the reality of a risen Christ because of her emotional state. In terms of receptivity she listens in spite of her own situation of faith.³⁵ Yet she does not take the sermon as a call for repentance. She acknowledges the preacher's words with very emotional, expressive language: 'it's a miracle', 'it's great' and she insists upon the very truth of the kerugmatic expression in the sermon though her own feelings do not match. There is something bigger; something beyond her private emotional state. Something she believes—already. Something that is affirmed by the preacher, not neutrally but communally.

In between the expressive sharing of the gospel (Shana) and its confronting announcement (Eric), however, we find a kind of midway position. The sermon *presents the Christ-event*. The preacher almost neutrally presents the facts of Jesus' life and the events of his death and resurrection. While talking about the sermon, Ronald reads his notes and creates his own account of the sermon:

34. On confirmation and confrontation see further section 10.4.

35. See section 6.5.

Easter calls for Pentecost. Because, I mean, he is crucified, well and while we all are very upset he is risen. For the time being, we are not finished with this, because I don't believe any of it. Nobody meets [someone who is risen from the death], so we have to hear about those meetings. He comes to us, to give us an example. Otherwise we would never believe it or we would stop believing.
(Ronald)

There is a kerugmatic attentiveness, the hearer perceives the realities of Christ and the gospel while dwelling in the sermon. The preacher, however, himself did not literally say 'we don't believe it' and 'we need an example'. The sermon presents the way of Christ from suffering to resurrection; and in listening the listener acknowledges that we need to hear about those meetings with the risen Jesus because otherwise we would not believe it or simply stop believing. The gospel is presented and the presentation of the kerugmatic facts of Christ and the Spirit simply direct the listener's mind. The Christ-event is thus at the center of how the sermon shapes attention on the part of the listener. The listener is not so much confronted to believe the call of the gospel; nor does he join the preacher in some corporate act of confession. He just listens and weaves his own thoughts around what is being presented. The listener becomes focussed upon the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The presentational mode is very affirmative and seems very open for interpretation on the part of the listener. He does so, however, in relation to the aboutness of the sermon, of Christ, his resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. Hence the kerugmatic illocutionary area in the world of the sermon does not represent one single type of proclamatory illocutions but concerns a diversity of modes and includes directives, expressives and affirmatives.

8.3.4 Textual attentiveness

Besides the kerugmatic and actual illocutionary area there is a third set of illocutions that shapes the listener's perception of the sermonic world and determines his attentiveness. Perception also concerns the area of *textual* illocutions. The reading of the Scriptures makes the listener aware of certain topics, raises questions, or prepares for what is coming up. It is about growing in the knowledge of the bible and better understanding its contents. William, one of the participants in this study, told that he disagreed with the Scripture reading and could not understand the parts of the Sermon of the Mount that were being read, but the sermon resolved his initial uneasiness.

The sermon points the listener to the Scriptural text, explains complex issues in the text, reminds the listener of the text, presents characters in the Scriptural narrative which listeners might associate themselves with, helps the listener to come to terms with the text and enlightens difficult passages. Ask listeners what

the sermon was about and many of them will provide an answer in terms of the Scriptural reading; the sermon has a Scriptural 'aboutness'. This is not just due to a high view of Scriptures as definite revelation of the Divine Word, but also because the bible is the primary source for preaching. There is no significant conceptual difference here with the listeners that belong to orthodox, liberal, or evangelical congregations. In other words, the theological self-understanding of the congregation does not make a difference on the importance of a textual attentiveness among hearers.

The textual attentiveness points to the fact that the sermon leads the listener into the biblical world. This is expected, since the biblical text is the source for the sermon, as one listener emphatically says. The preacher comes with his own ideas, he can talk for ten minutes or an hour, but what he says is about the bible. The biblical world is not just the historically reconstructed world into the present but refers primarily to the *text* of the Scriptures. Through the canonical text the history behind it becomes available. Leading the listener into the biblical world takes place in two modes. In the presentational mode, the listener is *captured by the text* of the Scriptures. In the teaching mode, the listener is *educated in the text* of the Bible.

Look, at the moment that you, you know like in your childhood, when a sermon was preached on David and Goliath for instance. Well, then you loved the story. Just as it is, without even realising the deeper thoughts behind it. One's just captured by the story. Something like that happens again from time to time.

(Eric)

The biblical text is very much part of the listener's faith. The fact that listeners are captured by the text is not so much the result of a great, rhetorical moving presentation on the part of the preacher, but the choice of the text, the appearance of the text in the sermon is important. 'In the weeks before Christmas', one listener says, 'I really like to hear the New Testament stories of Zachariah, the angel visiting Maria, the birth of John the Baptist. Those difficult prophetic passages from the Old Testament rather not.'

When they comment upon the value of preaching, many listeners indicate the educational function of preaching. Preaching helps them to understand the text. The listeners in this study thus share the protestant conviction that preaching makes biblical commentary available for all believers. Naturally, this does not mean that preaching is a running commentary on the text. Yet listeners are eager to hear things that they do not know or have not discovered before in the text.

Last sunday's sermon for instance, he [the preacher] told us about the four evangelists. All four wrote the Easter story in their own way, some talk about this,

others write about that. That makes one think, like which are those differences, what's the matter. It's from the Bible and it builds one's knowledge, it makes one think about the bible: it's not written out of nothing, they all had their own manner, one discovers that they wrote their own stories. That doesn't imply that it's untrue, I mean one can't check, but they made their own stories. That makes me think. (Lydia)

For many listeners the sermon disappears behind the text of the Scriptures after the service, witnessing various scattered remarks in the interviews, like 'at dinner we read the text again', 'he preached on a great text', and 'it helped me to understand the text better'. It is not just the text *qua* text that is object of education. The text testifies to historical and theological realities. The sermon also contains these historical references and doctrinal expositions yet they are perceived as part of the text from the perspective of the listener, and they help the listener in their own interaction with the Scriptures. It is not just historical curiosity to hear about the differences between gospels, there is something at stake for the listener:

Each of the authors has his own feelings with it. It's not like: this story is right, that one is wrong. There are differences between the stories. I like that. [...] It helps me to understand better how things are in the bible. I am reading the bible myself, a chapter a day, and I take notes about what strikes me. Well I don't see those things I hear in the sermon myself. So I like hearing that in a sermon. It helps me to read the bible more closely. (Lydia)

8.3.5 Intertwining text, gospel, and everyday life

The diversity in illocutionary areas gives a conceptual rendering of the variety of how listeners perceive the sermon. It provides further insight whether the listener perceives the sermon as a proclamation of the gospel, as an explanation of Scripture or about everyday life issues. Speech-act theorists offered various types of illocutions such as assertives, expressives, directives, exercitives, or commissives.³⁶ Thanking, praising, promising, explaining and declaring are variations of these classes. Previous research has tried to apply this for the analysis of sermons.³⁷ Listeners perceive the sermon through the lenses of three

36. This is Alston's list, see Alston, *Illocutionary Acts*, pp. 81–146. For other taxonomies, see J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*. 2nd edition. (Oxford Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1975), The William James lectures ; 1955, pp. 148–164 and J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society : philosophy in the real world*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998), pp. 146–152. For speech-acts see further above, section 2.4.

37. See H. W. Dannowski, 'Elementarisierung theologischer Begriffe in Sprechakten' in: P. Düsterfeld, editor, *Didaktik der Predigt. Modelle zur homiletischen Ausbildung und Fortbildung*. (Münster: Comenius Institut, 1975); W. Lukatis and K.-F. Daiber, 'Perzeption von Sprechakten

illocutionary areas. However, this leaves open the question what classes of illocutions are used or what combinations of types occur in each area. Types of illocutions do not correspond to a particular illocutionary area. For example, the kerugmatic illocutionary area may include different kinds of *expressives* such as utterances that praise Christ for what he has done in cross and resurrection; *affirmatives* that state the truth of the gospel; or *directives* such as to trust Christ. Either way the kerugmatic illocutionary area stands out regardless the particular illocutions that are ‘performed’ by the preacher. The idea of ‘area of sermonic illocution’ is broad enough to capture several kinds of illocutions as they have been developed in socio-linguistics and philosophy of language. Besides, further research into each of the three areas must demonstrate whether a particular area corresponds with a specific illocutionary type.

The three illocutionary areas are intertwined in the next fragment from the interview with Elly. She tells about a sermon in which the preacher gave a ‘great exposition’. So, and what’s so great about that exposition, I asked. She replied:

He usually starts with some anecdote. This time he told about a man he visited. A man in his forties having a severe illness (*life-world*). He talked with him about his suffering, and then he [viz. the preacher] made a connection with the biblical passage [about the suffering Jesus in Gethsemane] (*textual*). I can’t exactly say how he did that. Anyway, just what I said [before in the interview], don’t resign for that’s very passive which is not right. Don’t resist either, but surrender. He also made a connection with the High priest who represents humankind before God and vice versa (*kerugmatic*). Yes. Called and appointed by God and he [the preacher] said, that an important thing of the high priest is his ability to sympathise. Jesus is the perfect high priest who entered death on our behalf. Yes. To be high priest number one. Well, that’s how he explained it.
(Elly)

This fragment presents a very brief summary of the sermon. And in this summary the listener refers to all three illocutionary areas: the example of the forty-year old man (*life-world* area), the biblical text about Jesus in Gethsemane (*textual* area), and Christ as High Priest (*kerugmatic* area). The listener gives a full report in the sense that all three illocutionary areas are connected. The various illocutionary areas are not mutually exclusive at all but provide three lenses to perceive the sermon meaningfully.

This may function as a corrective of the ideas in Chapter 3 in which the three main kinds of divine-human dynamics, kerugmatic, interpretative and eschatological are dealt with rather exclusively as the literature indicates. Yet

aus protestantischen Predigten’. *The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, 2 (1978); K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigten. Analysen und Grundausswertung*. Volume 1, Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung. (München: Kaiser, 1980).

hearers do not behave according to these theological classifications. In exemplifying the three areas above I borrowed illustrations from the interviews with Eric. I could have chosen for more and different listeners because, interestingly, many listeners mention two or even three different areas. Some do so with respect to different sermons—as was the case with Eric. Yet some listeners, as with Eric, talk about a sermon in which attention was shaped with regard to all three realities, kerugmatic, life-world, and textual. We may use this insight to formulate quality criteria for sermons, but suggestions in that direction are given in the final chapter of this book.³⁸

8.4 CONCENTRATION: BETWEEN EXPERIENTIAL AND ATTENTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Attention, I have argued, is the perception of religious realities albeit that these realities are very differently structured. In the previous sections I have pointed out that there are mainly three domains of attentiveness. Listeners become oriented towards kerugmatic, textual or life-world-related realities that appear in the illocutionary world of the sermon. Concentration, however, is a property of attention. Attention is a direction of the mind towards the various illocutionary areas, but it also has a certain *intensity*. Measuring the factors that influence the concentration of listeners is difficult. It cannot easily be determined what positively contributes and what negatively influences the intensity and duration of the hearer's attention³⁹, let alone that qualitative research can be used to establish this. Something else, however, is more important here: the conceptual structure of concentration in sermon-listening. This section presents concentration as the 'glue' between experiential and attentive involvement.

The previous chapter introduced the two main attitudes of listening, finding pleasure in listening (section 7.4) and functional listening (section 7.5). The former indicates a liturgical-immediate, the latter a situational-reflective listening experience. The way listeners talk about the intensity of attentiveness during listening—a concentrated attitude—gives evidence for their attitude during the entire listening experience. When it comes to pleasure in listening, concentration is a vital framing and sustaining variable: lack of concentration destroys the pleasure in listening. Thus concentration and pleasure in listening are very much intertwined. I recall the listening incident that I quoted earlier in section 7.4, page 194. Now I quote the same incident again albeit in a broader context to indicate the relationship between concentration and pleasure—the *italicised* fragments have been quoted before:

38. See section 11.3.

39. Cf. H. Schwier and S. Gall, *Predigt Hören. Befunde und Ergebnisse der Heidelberger Umfrage zur Predigtrezeption*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 6–13.

I — It was more, like, there's something in the sermon, or something happening that...

Caroline— Yes. I think it helped a lot that he [viz. the preacher] mentioned one illustration, just one. And he kept on using that image, the whole sermon. It was kind of easy, because Paul already used the image in the text of the Scriptures. But he explained it in such a way and he told about how a seed grows and that you have to wait for a while. Well, you were almost waiting until the seed would come out. That's how he told it. And like that, not an illustration once and a while, but clearly coming back to it over and over again. [...] Very structured. Yes, that gives you a handle, actually.

I — That helps to make it happen, so to say.

Caroline— Yes because *he builds some kind of tension. I think that's what it is. He builds a climax*, and it's not going somewhere you have been before. Like you would say, well I knew that already. Then the whole thing collapses. No, but *a tension that really leads somewhere. So you experience something together as a community. Something from God. I believe that, yes.*

I — Together as a community, you experience something from God?

Caroline— Yes, because I look around me, and everyone was sitting, like, you know... well, so cool, you watch those young people, and I know quite a few of them, young people who are involved in the church but who do not experience that much usually. They were sitting there, listening intensely. Not the entire service. But really. A few times I looked around on purpose. Like, I am not the only one, am I? But no, I wasn't. And that's very special. (Caroline)

Here we have a positive example of a listener who talks about the way in which the building up of concentration contributes to and generates pleasure in the listening experience as a whole. Concentration for this listener has phenomenal and communal qualities: she is aware that other members in the audience are concentrated in what is happening, just like she is. There are, on the other hand, negative examples. Lack of concentration spoils the listening experience. For instance, the listener talked about having to fight to concentrate. She desperately wanted to be part of what was happening in the preaching event yet, caught up as she was with her everyday worries, she was unable to fully participate. Lack of concentration frustrated her listening experience. When concentration succeeds, it contributes to the experience itself; when it lacks, the listener becomes frustrated, not being able to find any pleasure in the experience and ultimately failing to become religiously involved in the preaching event in the way she hoped she would. She tells how her everyday problems and worries distracted her from following the sermon and experiencing the reality of grace and salvation that was made available through preaching. 'That's was not the preacher's fault, it was mine', one listener says, 'because I was too much occupied by my own life'. Despite these, almost opposite, experiences the examples convincingly

show a tight connection between concentration and the listening experience. It also demonstrates how pleasure in listening is built through an uninterrupted, barely consciously caused, almost phenomenal state of awareness or intense attentiveness.⁴⁰

The phenomenal aspect of concentration indicates another property of the listening process: the dimension of dialectics. As the example above indicates, the movement of the sermon and the building up of concentration correlate with the sense of an eschatological existence or 'ultimate reality'. It contributes to seeing or experiencing something from God. This experience of ultimate reality stands quite dialectically opposed to everyday life and its worries. The occasion that it happens is rare but it does happen. Notably, listeners express their disappointment when it does not happen—and when it does not happen they are quite willing to blame themselves rather than the preacher: they refer to their own state of mind, circumstances and other aspects concerning the listener's receptivity rather than to the preacher's performance.⁴¹ Listeners who address the issue of concentration in terms of keeping concentrated or building up concentration do so in the tension between the here-and-now life of faith, which is often a source for distraction—at least from their perspective—, and the ultimate reality in which they glimpse the future kingdom and experience grace. Concentration is the vital variable in this dialectics between lived-faith in the here and now on the one hand and the ultimate reality of divine grace on the other hand.⁴²

In functional listening⁴³ concentration entails something quite different compared to the examples mentioned above in which concentration is a vital and integral part of finding pleasure in listening. In a situational-reflective attitude concentration facilitates reflection on the part of the listener. This reflective function emerges when we study for instance the reports of hearers about the *length* of the sermon. It seems a rather trivial issue whether the sermon lasts for twenty or even for forty minutes. Many homileticians correctly stress the subjective condition of the 'experienced time' rather than blindly following communication guidelines declaring a sermon must never be held longer than twenty minutes because of the span of concentration. The length of the sermon is rather relative to the individual listener and the listening community⁴⁴:

40. Obviously, this is a conceptual hypothesis. At least it provides an intriguing agenda for further quantitative testing.

41. For receptivity, see above, section 6.1.

42. In Chapter 10 I present the dialectic dimension and its relationship with actualising faith in more depth.

43. See above, section 7.5.

44. Cf. M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive. Lessons from Laity*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), pp. 55–62.

Very hard, at least for me, is the length of the sermon. To stay concentrated. I am a rather analytic personality. So usually I tend to analyse the sermon. And at some point, I see the repetition. Then it's okay for me. Things keep coming back. Then I believe it's finished. When he keeps talking for another ten minutes, it's hard to concentrate constantly. [...] When I listen to a sermon, I listen and I listen actively. I am continually thinking about what I hear, what he [viz. the preacher] might mean etc. [...] I try to anticipate, what is coming next; to fill in what kind of direction he [viz. the preacher] is taking. I try to look ahead, to imagine with my limited knowledge, what he is aiming at. (Jonathan)

'The preacher brings a message and it's up to me how to process it.' This reflects Jonathan's listening position more or less. The listener determines whether the message is clear, distills it from the sermon and concludes that the sermon is finished. This is a typical example of functional listening. Obviously, this varies from listener to listener. Yet the common idea is that there is less immediate experience in the act of listening itself. Rather, concentration is a condition for the process of reflection that takes place within and is controlled by the listener. In fact, concentration facilitates the listener to listen functionally, either in contextualising the sermon for his own life or by using the sermon for whatever means.⁴⁵ Hence, concentration serves the listening experience in enabling the listener to reflect upon the sermon. For instance, to anticipate the preacher's next step, to determine the message of the sermon, or to conclude that the preacher may stop now. This relationship between concentration and listening fits the more usual understanding of concentration and attention, as it is conceived as part of 'normal' communicative behaviour regardless the religious context. A final feature of the relationship between concentration and the situational-reflective dimension of listening is 'stepping in or out'. Concentration is not so much one flow that is built up into a narrative climax, as we saw in the previous examples, but a series of brief processes of taking in the message, stepping out the sermon and reflecting, and stepping in again to take a next piece of the sermon.

In homiletics the connection between the listening experience and concentration is viewed from the angle of the preacher. Lowry, for instance, describes the sermon in terms of a plot that enfolds and moves towards a climax.⁴⁶ The idea of movement in the sermon is prevalent in contemporary—also called 'new'—homiletics. Lowry traces this idea of movement back to Grady Davis. Davis speaks about design and continuity instead of outline or construction of the sermon:

45. About using the sermon and contextualising the sermon, see above, section 7.5.

46. See E. L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot. The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Expanded edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

The conventional outline is a static and visual plan, whereas the sermon can be properly planned only as an audible movement in time. [...] And so I shall prefer to speak of the *continuity* or the *movement* of a sermon, rather than of its outline.⁴⁷

The way concentration works in the listening experience sparks this homiletic discussion on the issue of sermon-design. It is almost a commonplace in contemporary homiletics to put the sermonic outline against a more organic design. Listeners, it is argued, do not wish to hear points and structures, they wish to experience. Partly this is true, as the dimension of liturgical-immediate listening affirms. Indeed, listeners want to be part of the sermon, to dwell in it as an integral religious experience rather than perceiving ideas that are being transmitted through a carefully planned rational argument. In order to find pleasure in the preaching event, listening as religious practice *in se*, needs uninterrupted listening, intense attentiveness to the realms of bible, life of faith and gospel.

As the evidence above indicates, there is yet another dimension. Concentration is not just being caught into another realm, experientially and emotionally. It also concerns how listeners try to follow the argumentation in the sermon. They attempt to understand what the sermon is about by mixing it with their own experiences and thoughts. The sermon generates reflection on the part of the listener. Concentration controls this reflective process that runs in the hearer's mind. Concentration is not connected to pleasure and plot only; in preaching reflection and logical construction also count, witnessing the empirical evidence of the importance of concentration to follow the logic of the sermon. Argumentation, narrative flow and poetic style⁴⁸ contribute to the perception of the sermon. They differently shape attentive involvement according to the two main attitudes of pleasure and function. Some hearers experience pleasure while dwelling in the sermon. Poetic language and narrative flow create the necessary conditions for concentration. Others reflectively dwell in the sermon and want concepts and ideas. Logical arguments condition concentration accordingly. Either way, existential involvement in the world of the sermon is at stake for any listener. Whatever illocutionary area is perceived with what intensity of attentiveness, another question emerges: does it relate to me, to him or to us? The next subprocess in the stage of dwelling in the sermon consists of identifying.

47. H. G. Davis, *Design for Preaching*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 22.

48. For these three aspects of homiletic communication, see K. Bregman, *De stem uit de oneindigheid. Over de talige vormgeving van preken in het licht van poëzie en poëtica van Martinus Nijhoff*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2007), pp. 47–72.

9

IDENTIFYING WITH THE SERMON

Dwelling in the sermon, part 3: existential engagement

9.1 IDENTIFICATION AND EXISTENTIAL INVOLVEMENT

In a study on the role of personality in the pulpit, Van der Geest discusses what does listeners move in hearing sermons, how they become engaged in the preaching event through the presence of the preacher in the sermon.¹ He presents three dimensions: the listener seeks security, longs for deliverance, and expects understanding. His study focusses on the emotional side of sermon listening and stresses the spontaneity and natural character of the listener's feelings. We are not responsible for our feelings in the way we are for our thoughts and they allow us to directly experience the external world.² Important in Van der Geest's work, however, is the relationship of 'I-messages' and sermon listening. I-messages, Van der Geest states, tell us 'what is going on inside oneself' and an important aspect of sermon listening is locating the self of the listener in the sermon.³

Identification thus follows perception structurally. The perception of what is *in* the sermon, what realities can be perceived in the world of the sermon, and what is encountered while dwelling in the sermon remains remote if questions like 'what does it say to me', 'how does it concern me', and 'how can I relate to it', do not emerge. Therefore, getting religiously involved in the sermon is also existential; the sermon is supposed to concern *me*.

1. H. van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit. The impact of personality in preaching*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982). Cf. also H. C. Piper, *Predigtanalysen. Kommunikation und Kommunikationsstörungen in der Predigt*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976).

2. van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit*, pp. 14–20.

3. Ibid., p. 18.

This chapter builds upon the idea that there is a distance between the world of the sermon and the listener.⁴ The two are not identical. However, an important process during listening is that hearers attempt to identify with what is perceived in the religious world of the sermon. This chapter does not investigate *what* listeners identify with in a sermon but rather what *strategies* they use in order to do so. Two theoretical ideas are thus presented: there are several *ways* through which identification takes place (section 9.3); and identification comes with a particular *personal engagement* (section 9.4). In advance, however, the next section gives an impression of the central concern of existential involvement, namely religious recognition.

9.2 RELIGIOUS RECOGNITION

While William was still an unbeliever he accompanied his wife to church and

at a given moment the preacher mentioned in the sermon something that applied to what was going on at work at the time. At that moment one starts looking at one's private life from the perspective of faith. (William)

In the sermon there is something that resembles this hearer's situation at work. The spontaneous reaction of a retired elder of another church to the question why going to church is relevant, is remarkably similar:

It's always a surprise what the bible has to say about our everyday life. Something to be *recognized in the sermon*. Perhaps it's due to our minister, because he connects the everyday things with in the sermon in a very clear way. That's important to me. That *I recognize* the things the issues of everyday life in the sermon, yes that *I recognize in the sermon* the things of everyday life. I think that's important, that one *recognizes* things. Johnrecognition (John)

This fragment gives the *in vivo* concept that is central in the process of identification. It is the moment of recognition, saying: 'yes, this concerns me and my life'. The core of identification thus consists of *religious recognition*. Something is at stake that concerns my life of faith, something that relates to the Scriptures and appears in the sermon. Later in the interview John returns to the issue of recognition. The sermon, he says, is a means to recognize the voice of Jesus.

The next sections explore two ways in which religious recognition takes place and whether recognition is also communal or even third-personal. Perceiving the sermon may involve a certain distance. Yet identification with the sermon

4. During open coding, the concept of 'distance between sermon and listener' emerged. See above, section 5.2.4. In the next cycle (selective coding) this distance is further refined with several other concepts. During theoretical coding the idea of distance disappeared and was replaced by the notion of religious identification.

comes with the sense that the sermon is heard as a personal appeal, that the preacher addresses the community of faith as a whole, or the hearer recognizes something in the sermon that concerns someone else. The idea of religious recognition gives a framework to understand when listeners ‘move out’ the sermon, when they loose the connection with the religious world in the sermon, or when the sermon does not touch them: they are not able to identify with the sermon, there are no realities in the sermon that they recognize as part of their religious lives. So the lack of recognition such as the feeling that ‘it’s not about me’ or ‘it doesn’t concern my faith’, frustrates the entire process of getting religiously involved.

Pivotal in identification is thus the feeling of recognition: ‘Yes, this is what I believe!’ Listeners identify with a preacher who embodies their faith in all its aspects: when he expresses their doubts, their feelings of inadequacy, their longing for assurance of salvation, their basic convictions concerning God and history, life and death, existence and God’s final judgment. Listeners identify with situations in the sermon that they feel themselves in; they feel confronted by realities in the sermon or confirmed when they recognize something of what the preacher says or the way he says it. In the process of identification listeners figure out a connection between the preaching event and their own defined situation of faith. Do they recognize the reality that is addressed, or do they feel themselves aliens in a new, sometimes even strange, world? ‘Identification’ accounts for a pattern in the data that emerges over and over again in conversations with listeners. For instance, Eric tells about a sermon that captured his attention. The sermon not only provided him with a clear statement that he was able to understand but also engaged him on a more existential level:

What I just said: you are listening, and at first, you think: well, ok, this is what it is about (*perception*), but it’s not really meant for me (*identification*) [...] That’s natural, of course, for a human being to think like that, you know. And than at once, you become involved. I feel captured and very close; like, now I am in the midst of it. (Eric)

So, what is engaging with a good sermon like? Listeners tell

- it’s about me;
- I recognize something from my own life;
- the preacher reaches out to me;
- the sermon connects to what is important to me;
- the sermon helped me to recognize myself in the characters of the biblical story;
- the preacher appeared to be a normal human being, just like me;
- I was able to connect my own life with the sermon.

Listeners come up with these incidents of identification in a religious framework. Identification is not primarily about important anthropological insights and socio-psychological challenges—though this admittedly might be the case with good sermons—but identification concerns the recognition of realities of faith. Eric tells about a sermon on the resurrection of Christ. The preacher, following the lead in 1 Corinthians 15, compares the resurrection with growing a plant. Then Eric says:

In today's world people are very much engaged in the issue of death; death creates anxiety, while a believer actually sees through death or beyond death, and sees it as a temporary thing, you know. This metaphor about the seed, it really hit me. The body vanishes in the grave, and in the resurrection, when Christ returns, it re-appears. It's like you say: I plant a seed and a beautiful plant or flower appears; different than you put in the soil. If you start looking in the soil, you will find nothing. He said to the children: 'you all have a garden here, and perhaps you can plant some seeds, just to see it with your own eyes.' Look, I love to work in the garden, so I know it myself. But I had never thought of it in this way. (Eric)

I highlight a few features in this quotation. First, the respondent clearly differentiates between the idea in the sermon that he was able to perceive (namely, that 'the resurrection of Christ is inextricably linked to our resurrection') on the one hand, and the identification with this idea as it connects to his own life-world and creates recognition on the other hand. ('look, I love to work in a garden, I know it'). Second, the moment of identification is located in a metaphor in the sermon ('seed') and the explicit relation to the life-world of the congregation ('you all have a garden'). The sermon connects an image from the text with a situation in the life-world of the congregation and thus bridges the distance between hearer and sermon world. Thirdly, the connection generates *existential involvement*: it is an issue of life and death. In listening he came to recognize the reality of his own resurrection on the day of the Lord. It helped him as a Christian believer 'to look through or beyond death'.

9.3 WAYS OF IDENTIFICATION

In the subprocess of identifying with the sermon listeners (re)connect to the reality of faith. In the previous chapter I distinguished between perception and understanding, and identification takes this idea one step further. It is only in perceiving the realities in the sermon and knowing what the sermon is about, that listeners are able to identify with the sermon. For instance, William clearly distinguishes between the two:

Since last year, when I started to go church you begin to translate the biblical text to your own situation. Recently, a guest preacher had this illustration

about an eagle and his offspring. He feeds them, and when the time is ripe he throws them out of the nest, but in such a way that he watches them and catches them if necessary (*perceiving the sermon*). And then you start thinking, the eagle is like God, the offspring is the community, when things go wrong I am caught. I looked for that message, beyond the sermon, because you start thinking yourself, what is the message behind it (*identifying with the sermon*).
(William)

In order to identify with the sermon, however, the hearer must be able to understand the language and the symbols employed in the sermon. William gives two examples:

POSITIVE: The minister did not only mention the bible but also very practical things. Not just the biblical text, but also examples from television, from the music-channels [...] It made it really clear to me how certain things are not as they are supposed to be. Like with the text from Job 31, that you have to make a covenant with your eyes. You shouldn't look at other women with eager eyes, that's wrong. That's something I think at that moment. (*The symbolic world of the sermon helps to identify with the sermon.*)

NEGATIVE: Your body is a temple of the holy Spirit. I can't understand that. That your body is like a temple. I really don't know what to think about that. And he didn't explain it either. Perhaps it's clear for you [his wife, TP], but such an example makes me think: help, I don't know what to do with it. (*The symbolic world of the sermon hinders the process of identification.*) (William)

For religious recognition to positively occur, the interviews point towards two distinct directions, two *ways of* identifying with the sermon: (1) listeners identify with the performance of the preacher (relational identification), and (2) they identify with symbols or story-lines in the sermon (symbolic-narrative identification). These two ways are not mutually exclusive but provide different routes through which the listener is able to identify himself with the world of the sermon and its aboutness, and to acquire insight how the sermon relates to his life, and whether it challenges or encourages him.

9.3.1 Symbolic-narrative identification

The sermon thus presents a narrative world that refers to religious realities, such as divine grace, the experience of divine absence, trouble and sin, and metaphors for growth and renewal. Listeners connect to these realities through the linguistic symbols and structures that are employed in the sermon. They do not just cognitively understand these realities, but they relate to these instances of religious realities in terms of their own situation in life. They talk about 'connections' between the sermon and their lived-faith. So the question is: how does the sermon facilitate this kind of identification? Three indicators

in the interviews provide an answer to this question. These indicators concern various aspects of the symbolic-narrative structure of the sermon. First of all, listeners identify with *relevant topics* in the sermon. Recognition is facilitated when the topics in the sermon are relevant from the perspective of the listener. Secondly, listeners identify through a *symbolic-linguistic balance* of the sermon. Connection is established if the language—terminology and vocabulary—of the sermon creates recognition or challenges the listener to consider a fresh insight. Thirdly, listeners identify with *narrative situations* in the sermon. A narrative situation is a brief story, an image, or real-life situation that challenges the hearers, makes them think and generates positive or negative recognition. Recognition is thus shaped through something relevant, something capturing, or something imaginable. These three indicators concern each of the previously mentioned illocutionary areas of the sermon. Topical relevance may concern the text of the Scriptures that is being preached on, aspects of the gospel, or realities taken from everyday life. Likewise, the linguistic balance of the sermon may concern abstract theological notions, concrete biblical references or everyday language. Finally, the narrative situations may concern real-life stories, situations from the text of the Scriptures, or a narrative rendering of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The three indicators thus demonstrate how identification takes place and that recognition occurs *by way of* the symbolic-narrative world of the sermon.

TOPICAL RELEVANCE Half-way the interview Judith comments on the preacher's choice of texts to preach on in the time before Christmas. She wonders why the preacher does not stick to the gospel-readings which start with the announcement of John the Baptist's birth and ends with the gospel narrative on Mary and Joseph. 'Then you are naturally led to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ', she expresses her disappointment. She continues: 'Instead, the preacher chose to preach from these difficult Old Testament texts, from Isaiah and so on. Why not those texts that we were always used to hear this time of the year? I expect a different sermon this time of the year.'

Introducing a text to preach from or a topic to address—or avoiding a particular text or topic—is not trivial because listeners like Judith simply may fail to identify with the preacher's choice of a text or topic to preach about. She is unable to recognize the reality of Advent-expectation. Perhaps the preacher is not clear in how he introduces his text or places the Old Testament prophesy in the context of Christmas but for this listener, however, the text of the sermon and the topics addressed in the sermon did create a distance between her and the reality of Advent-expectation rather than helping her to connect with the coming of the Messiah. Judith's side-remark in the interview illustrates how topical relevance functions in the context of identification. It means that listeners better recognize the realities of faith in the preaching event if they see the relevance of the text or

topic that is preached on or introduced in the sermon. Further, her remark also illustrates that topical relevance does not always imply that a sermon is relevant when it concerns enough every-day life references but relevancy can also be couched in terms of the Scriptural text. Deborah mentions a sermon in which the preacher addresses animal rights in the period of a cattle-disease in the area and William tells about his first experience with hearing a sermon and mentions how the sermon connected with a situation that went on at work at that moment. Recognition occurred because the sermon was relevant to their everyday life. These examples also show that the relevancy is attributed to by the hearer as well as provided by the preacher. In other words, the preacher does not only include relevant material in the sermon but the listener also judges the sermon to be relevant, as William does. On the other hand Deborah demonstrates that relevancy is also something to be considered by the preacher: is this topic relevant to the situation we are in together?

So relevancy is *attributed to* the sermon by the listener as well as *offered in* the sermon by the preacher. Further, relevancy does not only appear on an individual level. Hearers talk about the importance of relevancy for and recognition by others than themselves.⁵ A final connection can be made with the listening experience⁶. Topical relevancy is a way to experience pleasure in listening (so Judith) and creates hooks too for functional listening (so William and Deborah).

SYMBOLIC-LINGUISTIC BALANCE Another indicator for identification concerns the language of the sermon. Should the sermon be very concrete? ‘No,’ says Ronald, ‘when it becomes too concrete it becomes political’. The sermon must be a safe environment—free from political or ideological positions—and should invite the listener to make his own identifications. When a sermon becomes too concrete, the listener is put too much into one particular framework. On the other hand, however, when hearers complain that sermons are too abstract, they feel unable to connect with the world of the sermon or to find connections between the sermon and their everyday life. At the background, the homiletic discussion between concreteness and poetic openness is at stake. The more poetic, the more listeners are able to ‘read between the lines’ or fill in the open space to craft their own meanings and interpretations.⁷ The more concrete, the more listeners are able to identify with certain realities that are named in the sermon. A

5. For the idea of ‘third-person’ listening, see below, section 9.4.2.

6. See above, Chapter 7.

7. Cf. B. Altena, *Wolken gaan voorbij... Een homiletisch onderzoek naar mogelijkheden voor de preek in een postmodern klimaat*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003); K. Bregman, *De stem uit de oneindigheid. Over de talige vormgeving van preken in het licht van poëzie en poëtica van Martinus Nijhoff*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2007).

delicate symbolic-linguistic balance is needed to provide leads for identification without closing the world of the sermon for the listener's imagination.

This linguistic balance does not only apply for the opposites concrete versus abstract. There is also a balance between the new and the known. In the sermon both well-known terms (the stereotypes or clichés) as well as new language should be employed. Caroline tells about the preacher who in the sermon said something like 'you have to know Christ.' 'This is such a general remark,' Caroline reacts, 'it's a stereotype that you have heard so many times already.' On the other hand, in another conversation Caroline said that every sermon should be about Christ and what 'Jesus has done for me.' Very typical and well-known terms are employed to express this. This pattern in the data demonstrates that the balance between new language and stereotypes in religious language are both necessary for recognition and identification. Recognition is possible when there is already something in the religious mind of the listener. In order to dwell in the world of the sermon, the well-known should be there as well as new things to explore. Identification takes place between in this balance between the new and the known.⁸

In conclusion, the sermon as a symbolic world moves between abstract ideas and concrete realities, and between religious stereotypes and new notions. Stereotypical religious language in the sermon creates a communal experience of 'this is what we believe together' while a certain abstractness creates an openness for listeners to be part of the sermon without being instantly judged. Yet when the sermon contains too many clichés it becomes a massive building, accessible only for those who know the language; but when the sermon is too concrete it runs the risk of becoming a moralistic yoke, too heavy for the hearer to bear.

NARRATIVE SITUATIONS Relevant topics and balanced language are means for hearers to identify with the symbolic-narrative world of the sermon. Finally, they also identify with the sermon by means of pieces in the sermon that contain narrative material. Imagination is stirred by narrative material in the sermon and by illustrative stories.⁹ Narrative material in sermons, however, does not just imply cute and funny stories. 'Narrative' here should be broadly understood, as something that the preacher tells or presents that has elements of a narrative structure, like actors, setting, action, opposition, and plot.¹⁰ The narrative elements in the sermon function as situations with which the listener can identify.

8. See further on the duration of actualising faith, section 10.2.

9. Cf. R. Eslinger, *Narrative Imagination. Preaching the worlds that shape us*. (Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 1995).

10. For a full narrative structure that consists of elements such as sender, object, receiver, helper, agent, and opponent, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1989), pp. 69–77. Wright follows the analysis of stories by A. J. Griemas, based upon the work of Vladimir Propp.

These narrative situations provide hooks in the sermon for listeners not just to keep track of the sermon¹¹ but to recognize, to feel affirmed or challenged by.

Identification takes place when narrative situations are taken from all three dominant illocutionary areas: textual, kerugmatic, and everyday life. Most obvious to identify with are *life-world situations*, situations taken from everyday life such as a story, a personal insight, a cultural phenomenon, or something that happened and stirred the congregation. Grace tells how the preacher mentioned the appearance of sexually explicit videoclips on television in his sermon against adultery. She recognized this as something that is part of her everyday world. Completely different but also exemplifying a life-world situation is the following incident:

That example [in the sermon] about the severely ill man, you know the kind of suffering and the suffering that we question in our lives. That we ask: ‘why?’ while that’s probably not the most pressing question at all. Acceptance is much harder. [...] I am really struggling to accept some aspects of my life. For instance that my husband left me, I find that very difficult to accept. (Elly)

Kerugmatic situations are perceived pieces in the sermon that refer to elements of the Christian gospel that are recognized by the hearer as hooks to identify with. For instance, Shana recalls how the preacher posed a question in the sermon, namely ‘what would you write in your letter to Christ?’ Compare also Jonathan who acknowledges that the fact Christ defeated death may be an assurance for those in fear of death. Elly, for example, mentions how she felt close to Christ when the minister talked about Christ’s suffering. She religiously recognized the narrated situation of Christ’s suffering. So the stories, questions or examples taken from the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the working of the Spirit in the Church and the eschatological vision are situations to which the listener respond with recognition. They may be brief references in which the kerugmatic story is largely assumed but also a more elaborated narration in which the listener dwells for a moment. Finally, *textual situations* are pieces in the sermon that concern elements of the narrative in which the Scriptural text is embedded (the author of the text, his situation, the audience, the story in the text, the circumstances of the protagonist of the biblical story etc.). Listeners identify with characters, actions, resistance, and situations that appear in the biblical text. Kathy, for instance, tells how every sermon on the Prodigal Son (*Luke* 15, 11–32) helps one to take a position, sometimes one sees himself as the elder brother, other times one feels like the younger.

11. For concentration, see above section 8.4.

9.3.2 Relational identification

The second way of identification is the *homiletic relationship*. In their study Mulligan and Allen¹² distinguish five types of relationships between preacher and audience ranging from personal connection from the pulpit to experiences with the pastor in non-church events beyond the walls of the church. They correctly observe that the relationship between listener and preacher extends beyond the setting of worship and occurs within many contexts other than preaching: pastoral experiences and other situations of personal interaction between the preacher and his congregation, during informal meetings, sporting events, or bible-study groups, shape the broader listener-preacher relationship. They do not, however, focus on the speciality of the *homiletic* relationship and its properties. In another publication they acknowledge the fact that it helps audiences to 'establish identification' when a pastor speaks from his own experience.¹³ Yet the very idea of identification, as it is related to the homiletic relationship between preacher and audience, remains rather under-conceptualised.

In general, the homiletic relationship emerges from multiple *contexts of knowing the preacher*, such as previous listening experiences, the pastoral contacts with the minister, catechetical instruction or a personal impression of the preacher's character. Two incidents from the interviews clarify this piece of theory: (1) Kathy reports how a preacher talks about a situation in which he had to deal with his own anger; the listener is surprised by his sincerity. Beforehand she thought him to be rather arrogant. (2) Caroline got to know the preacher better in the context of catechesis and she tells that it helped her to appreciate his sermons better. These listeners assume a wider array of encounters between them and the preacher but in the end they subsume these other experiences under the rubric of the homiletic relationship. The other contexts of knowing the preacher may hinder or help identification in the homiletical relationship. Central however, is the *personal presence* of the preacher in the act of preaching.

Personality has been an important theme in several homiletical approaches. Rhetoric is concerned with the reflective construction of a *persona*, the role that the speaker consciously adopts for this occasion. According to classic rhetorical theory the 'persona' provides the speaker with a particular kind of persuasiveness, the speaker's *ethos*.¹⁴ So rhetorical approaches to preaching stress the fact that preachers should be aware of the ethos-dimension of preaching. Communication scholars, such as Schulz von Thun, argue that any act of communication has

12. M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), pp. 67-90.

13. M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive. Lessons from Laity*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), p. 27.

14. L. L. Hogan and R. Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation. Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), pp. 47-67.

four aspects: substance, expression, appeal, and self-revelation.¹⁵ In the act of preaching, preachers reveal aspects of their personality to the audience. Further, psychological approaches aim to demonstrate how personality unconsciously determines the event of preaching. For example, Dannowski relates Riemann's four fundamental anxieties with the content-relationship structure of preaching. He argues that each 'anxiety' unconsciously shapes either the content or the relationship component in the act of preaching. Consequently, he constructs four psychological personalities of the preacher: (1) the preacher of order (content devours relationship); (2) the preacher of freedom (relationship creates content); (3) the preacher of insight (content creates relationship) and, (4) the preacher of love (relationship devours content).¹⁶

The rhetorical and psychological approaches are worthwhile perspectives albeit that they fail to account for the way in which listeners perceive the *religious* personality of the preacher in the context of identification. In the act of preaching the preacher embodies the preached gospel in person. Whether rhetorically effective or not; whether psychologically problematic or not. The preacher provides the listeners with a bodily image and a living example in the act of preaching.¹⁷ Therefore, the issue here is not whether and how listeners value the rhetorical *persona*¹⁸ or psychological personality of the preacher in the act of preaching. These issues certainly need attention in homiletical theory, since they provide explanations for the role of personality in the preparation and delivery of a message.¹⁹ The *religious personality* of the preacher, however, emerges as more relevant to be considered in studying how listeners take part in the preaching event. No rhetorical strategies nor psychological health count for audiences but whether they perceive the preacher as someone they can connect with as a person of faith.

Two kinds of religious personalities emerge from the interviews with the respondents in this study. Two kinds of how the gospel is embodied in the personality of the preacher and how listeners identify with the religious reality that is embodied in the preaching event: (1) the communal or fellow-believer personality, and (2) the caring or pastoral personality of the preacher.

15. F. Schulz von Thun, *Miteinander reden. Störungen und Klärungen. Allgemeine Psychologie der Kommunikation*. Volume 1, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1981). For its reception in homiletical theory see, for instance, P. Oskamp and R. Geel, *Concreet en beeldend preken*. (Bussum: Coutinho, 1999).

16. H. W. Dannowski, *Kompendium der Predigtlehre*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985), pp. 55–57. Cf. also van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit*; Piper, *Predigtanalysen*.

17. On the bodily aspects of presence, see Mulligan and Allen, *Believing in Preaching*, pp. 46–66.

18. See R. J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004) for data on the ethos-dimension of preaching.

19. See van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit* for an empirical study.

PERSONALITY OF THE FELLOW-BELIEVER Hearers identify with preachers who are 'one of them'. In the empirical material indicators for this category range from a preacher with a certain diction that engages the listener to a preacher who expresses attitudes of faith that are similar to those experienced by the audience. When listeners perceive a preacher who is 'one of them', they recognize in somebody else what they believe in. So recognition is relational. Religion is not an abstract body of beliefs or convictions, but is lived out and bears upon real people and real situations. In the pulpit the preacher's personal presence counts as an example of lived-faith. At the end of the interview Elly wanted to pay her preacher a compliment. She says: 'I find him a good interpreter of Scripture. And I also think that he has always been very human.' I asked her what she meant. She explains: 'He doesn't just stand above people. He is one of us. And he himself probably wrestles with issues.' She is not sure about whether the preacher feels troubled at times but she can imagine he does because she acknowledges that he is one of them; a fellow-believer; someone with the same questions and problems. The religious personality of the preacher assures people that they do not need to consider themselves as perfect Christians; they feel relieved when they perceive the preacher as 'just like one of them'.

I sometimes think for myself: well, I am so occupied with all these daily things; and then you hear the preacher. He says, perhaps in a different way, 'what are we people busy with so many things' Then I think, o, fortunately, I am not the only one. [...] it's so human, yes, we are all like that. Because you can imagine that who you are, you cannot just sit down quietly with a bible all day; just you and the Lord. Even if you are a preacher. (Judith)

Listeners also connect to the preacher as fellow-believer when his religious presence in the pulpit challenges them to live up to the gospel. Not that the preacher is seen as a super-believer or a giant in faith but the exemplification of lived-faith in the preacher's personality makes listeners think, and just like with other fellow-Christians it challenges them in their life of faith.

You need other people. People that can give you insights. You recognize something. You need that. [...] Constantly you need this other person to hold up the mirror, whether you are following the right track or not. (Ronald)

The preacher provides them with a 'counter'-example in relation to their own lives or a paradigm that, at least, is worth considering. Thus identification also takes place in the mode of confrontation: in the religious personality of the preacher the listener finds himself confronted with the claims of the gospel or with an alternative way of viewing life.

PASTORAL PERSONALITY Rather than sitting next to him as a fellow-believer, the preacher also sits besides the hearer—with a caring presence. Listeners feel that the preacher cares about them whether they accept the gospel message or not. The preacher's pastoral personality is revealed in the topics he addresses, such as the spiritual concerns of the listeners or the wider interest of the community concerning religious questions and theological issues that emerge in everyday life. But they also feel this presence, in the preacher's language, his presentation and in other aspects of the embodiment of the sermon.

Care for the listener. The caring presence of the preacher is felt when the needs of the individual listener or the community of faith are met. One listener tells about a sermon that was preached during a period in which the village he lived in was threatened by a terrible cattle disease. The preacher not only competently and professionally dealt with this situation; he also expressed concern and empathized with the members of the community in their fear of having their cattle destroyed. The pastoral presence of the preacher embodied the caring presence of God in the midst of a troubling situation. Listeners identify with such a presence in the sense that they recognize God's care for creation and his comfort in critical times.

Care on behalf of the listener. In this sense the caring presence of the preacher is not so much felt by the listener as an individual who needs care for himself; but the listener is thankful for the preacher who identifies with others in the congregation. The preacher takes on the role as pastor for the community, provides the congregation with a model for how pastoral care might be practiced, and does what members of the community are supposed to do. The preacher acts on behalf of the listener, and the listener identifies with this caring presence as a caring presence of the church towards individuals or situations. Some listeners expect the pastor to do so. They feel sorry for those who grieve and thus expect the preacher to speak comforting words; they feel very committed to the youth of the congregation and thus expect the preacher to address the young believers; they feel unable to speak to those in tough situations and thus expect the preacher to care for those who are. Listeners identify with preachers who care for others on behalf of them.

In sum, identifying moments in the preaching event come into being when listeners recognize the example, perseverance, a caring attitude or personal trouble of faith in the person of the preacher.²⁰ In the act of preaching the preacher represents a here-and-now 'embodiment' of the gospel. How do listeners perceive the religious personality in preaching and how does it function in the whole of identification? Not every listener judges in the same way, nor do all

20. Whether or not the preacher constructs a rhetorical *persona* does not seem relevant here.

listeners equally value the personal presence of the preacher in the pulpit. To some the preacher's religious personality is a less important means for identification than to others, or, as Jonathan puts it, 'You may feel the difference between preachers. Everyone puts himself in the sermon. That is important. Yet on the other hand, it [viz. the personal aspect] is not allowed to dominate the sermon.' The German homiletician Manfred Josuttis subtitled an article on the presence of the preacher in the pulpit as 'sinful human being or independent witness'. He deals with several ways of how a preacher can make use of first-person language in the pulpit and distinguishes between six uses of 'I' or 'me': verificational, confessional, biographical, representative, exemplaric, and fictional.²¹ In the light of our analysis this far, it seems that using 'I' in the pulpit has a great value in the process of identification. Whether and to what extent the use of 'I' can be a means for identification has to be determined by the audience rather than on dogmatic criteria.²²

9.4 DEGREES OF PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW THE SERMON RELATES TO THE LISTENER'S LIVED FAITH

Existential involvement is created through two routes—narrative-symbolic and relational—but another aspect of existential involvement is equally important: it comes in various degrees. Some listeners are highly personally involved while others feel disconnected because the sermon does not even touch their own world of faith so recognition does not take place. Essentially, existential involvement concerns the relationship between the sermon and the hearer's lived faith, namely the bridging of the distance between the two by religious recognition. This aspect of hearing has been stressed in many studies: sermons do make sense to listeners when the sermon connects with their lives. Selection mechanisms in hearing a sermon are (partly) explained by the fact that the hearer's life is at stake. Lydia, for instance, tells about two listening experiences. She was captured by one sermon because it very much related to her own life at the moment. She had just returned from a journey to a Third World country and the next Sunday the minister addressed the differences between poor and rich in the sermon. This incident contrasts with another part of the interview about the period in which she took notes during the sermon:

21. M. Josuttis, 'Der Prediger in der Predigt. Sündiger Mensch oder mündiger Zeuge?' in: *Praxis des Evangeliums zwischen Politik und Religion. Grundprobleme der Praktischen Theologie* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1988), pp. 87–94.

22. On personal preaching and the use of 'I' in the pulpit, also see K.-F. Daiber et al., *Predigen und Hören. Band II. Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hörern. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*. (München: Kaiser, 1982), *Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung*, pp. 296–301.

The rich become richer, the poor poorer—while I just returned from the Dominican Republic. Wow! ‘Make sure that the rich give to the poor.’ I found that engaging, really! Those pieces in the sermon stand out. They speak to something that happened in my own life.

[...]

When the sermon does not touch you, your thoughts start wandering away. That’s just as it is. Taking notes helps to concentrate. You have to listen. Automatically, you start paying attention to what he is saying, even if it does not touch you, it does engage you when you are taking notes. (Lydia)

Personal engagement can be strengthened when listeners themselves consciously determine to follow the sermon, to capture what the sermon is about, and to engage in a conscious effort to create and maintain concentration.²³ Personal engagement thus comes in degrees.

Yet a broader pattern is visible. Not so much the personal life of the listener is at stake but, as the idea of hearing in community points out²⁴, the community of faith, the social networks in which the listener participates (work, family) and the human condition in general provide a context in which the listener determines the value of the sermon. In other words, personal engagement is more than a mere individual engagement. Identification happens on the individual level (hearing for themselves) while it also occurs beyond the individual listener (hearing for others). The latter, however, does not imply that the listener herself felt disconnected to the sermon, rather, in listening she had a fellow-believer in mind for whom the sermon could have important implications. The specific religious realities perceived in the sermon might not have been recognized by the listener in relation to her own personal situation of faith; rather, she sees a connection between the sermon and someone she knows and, though not particularly highly involved herself, she readily accepts the relevance of the sermon to someone else in the community of faith. Hence the degrees of existential involvement do not so much differ between high or low but consist in a range of personal-relatedness: there are several degrees of personal engagement. This section introduces three degrees of personal engagement with the sermon: abstract engagement, third-person engagement, and first-person engagement.

23. On concentration, see further above section 8.4.

24. See for the notion ‘hearing in community’ as developed during the cycle of open coding, section 5.2.4.

9.4.1 Abstract engagement

Hearing a sermon entails identifying with the sermon yet identification does not always relate to the personal situation of the listener. Some experience the sermon as ‘something relevant to those in that particular situation’. In fact listeners politely address the fact that the sermon did not engage them existentially. On the other hand, however, they do not imply that the sermon is completely irrelevant. They do engage with the sermon abstractly: they can imagine that there are people to whom the sermon is either very confrontational or to whom the sermon is a comforting world despite the fact that they themselves are not particularly engaged by the topics that are addressed in the sermon. Two examples, both of religious confrontation and consolation may suffice to illustrate abstract engagement with the sermon.

As I said, he never dealt with divorce in a sermon as he did this time. From time to time there were remarks but this time was different. The sanctity of matrimony; those things that I have been raised in. But you know, when you closely read in Matthew, about giving your wife a letter of divorce and then if you remarry, the husband is also to be blamed for adultery. That sounds very hard. You know it happens. *It does not concern my situation, but yes, I can imagine, there are people sitting in church, you know, and when this is said in the bible. I can imagine that it sounds really confronting to them.* (Grace)

The listener is personally engaged although the sermon did not address her private situation. ‘It does not concern me’, she says. ‘But I can imagine that it concerns others.’ This abstract engagement does not include particular individuals in the community of faith. Abstractly engaged also is the listener who says that ‘there may come a time in my life that I recognize the things the preacher was talking about; and I know of others who would have felt very comforted in their situation. But no, it was not about me this time.’ He talked about a sermon that was about the comforting thought that there is life after death, that the resurrection of Christ promises the resurrection of all believers. Was there any recognition in the sermon? ‘No, not for me’, Jonathan said,

but it’s a beautiful story, from Genesis, the Old Testament to Paul’s message to the Corinthians about the resurrection. Beautiful, what a promise! You don’t have to be afraid to die. But personally I am not afraid to die. I try to connect with the message. In case of my work, for instance. It’s not for me, but probably for those people [in hospital] that are indeed afraid to die. Perhaps they can find peace in the comforting and beautiful message of the here-after. (Jonathan)

Is this listener not existentially involved? Not personally but there is certainly some kind of existential involvement here. It extends beyond the individual life of this particular hearer. Although he does not think about someone in

particular, he can imagine that there are people to whom this sermon might have been comforting. In other words: identification takes place through the symbolic-narrative world of the sermon, the sermon is significant indeed, yet not in relation to him but in relation to others—the ‘them’ he does not further talk about. He meets them in his work as a male nurse. So in listening there is an awareness of others, those who suffer of sorrow and grief while this does not relate to his personally defined situation of faith.

9.4.2 Third-person engagement

While abstract engagement is highly imaginative—the hearer imagines someone or a group of people who might engage with elements of the sermon—third-person listening is more concrete, it concerns a group of members of the congregation or one particular individual who may have been engaged by or might benefit from the sermon according to the respondent. Engagement is dealt with as something that happens to someone else instead of the listener himself. Third-person engagement, however, is not abstract but concrete. The hearer talks about the children in the congregation that were moved by the sermon or tells about how other people dwelled in the sermon existentially.

That’s something the lady said on the way back [John drives this elderly lady back home from church]. She said, ‘I lost a son when he was 17’. She told us how sad that was. ‘But I have seen that I have been carried through and have been able to lay it in God’s hands, to accept the way.’ Yes. I thought, yes, she recognized it too. In the sermon. I really liked that. (John)

This incident illustrates another level of engagement. John notes the fact that a fellow believer was existentially engaged by the sermon; she ‘recognized’ what went on in the sermon concerning Christ’s suffering and death. John telling a story concerning another listener, points to *third-person engagement* with the sermon.

Until now, this ‘third-person’ degree of existential involvement has not received the attention in homiletics that it would deserve. The fact that many studies are particularly interested in individual listeners account for this gap in theory formation. Perhaps the assumption that sermons should relate to the lived-faith of the listeners themselves has blocked researchers to positively account for those incidents in the data that suggest third-person engagement. Hearers in this study are remarkably tolerant to sermons that do not directly concern themselves and show a clear sense of community when they are aware of others when they listen to a sermon.²⁵ This awareness of others rather than

25. In the broader field of communication ‘the third-person perceptions or effects’ of media usage are dealt with in research since its first articulation by Davison in 1983. Cf. for the latest

of oneself, hence 'third-person engagement', makes listening a more communal and a less individualistic experience but it by no means implicates that listeners try to keep the sermon away from themselves.

9.4.3 First-person engagement

Existential involvement can finally be articulated very personally in the first-person sense. Hearers report that the sermon was not about others but about them—or they complain that the sermon did not existentially touch them while they hoped it would. When they identify with the world of the sermon in a first-person sense, the hearer himself is at stake.

First-person listening comes in two different versions, a singular (this is about me) and a plural (this is about us) version. In the plural sense, first-person listening becomes communal: the sermon is not solely about me but it's about *us*. The plural version is sometimes spontaneously stressed which is indicated by utterances like 'I felt that we were all engaged by this sermon', 'the preacher addressed us all', or 'when he addressed us, the preacher included himself'. The plural version of first-person existential engagement expresses that dwelling in the sermon is something that the listener experiences with other believers. The sermon provides a religious home, it generates a kind of recognition on the part of the listener that is less rational in the quest for new ideas; it rather concerns the larger cognitive framework of belief in God as is experienced in this tradition and expressed in this congregation. So it reflects the attitude of pleasure in listening, or as one hearer puts it when he summarizes the worship experience as a whole: 'it's because of being there, being captured by all kinds of things, the sermon, the singing together, and yes, that engages you emotionally, something like: I belong here.'

More in the front of homiletical rationality, however, the question is whether and how listeners are individually engaged by the sermon, how existential involvement is created and what it is like. Thus the individual listening self remains important. What does it do to me personally? The interest in first-person (singular) engagement is very significant since it accounts for the way in which hearers dwell the sermon as a world that concerns the self of the listeners, and the way in which the sermon touches, challenges, confronts or comforts them. This singular version of first-person engagement, however, is best dealt with when

discussions in the field of communication studies D. M. McLeod, B. H. Detenber and W. P. Eveland Jr., 'Behind the Third-Person Effect: Differentiating Perceptive Processes for Self and Other'. *Journal of Communication*, (2001); J. D. Jensen and R. J. Hurley, 'Third-Person Effects and the Environment: Social Distance, Social Desirability, and Presumed Behavior'. *Journal of Communication*, (2005); J. L. Lambe and D. M. McLeod, 'Understanding Third-Person Perception Processes: Predicting Perceived Impact on Self and Others for Multiple Expressive Contexts'. *Journal of Communication*, (2005).

we turn to the final stage in the process of getting religiously involved, namely *actualising faith*. Actualising faith concerns the first-person self of the hearer, individually and corporately; its properties and dimensions thus present an in-depth analysis of first-person engagement with the sermon. In other words, first-person engagement with the sermon moves hearing from the second stage, dwelling in the sermon, to the third stage, actualising faith.

10

ACTUALISING FAITH

10.1 THE THIRD STAGE OF GETTING RELIGIOUSLY INVOLVED

When we inquire into listener's reports concerning hearing sermons it emerges that foremost their *faith* is at stake. Take, for instance, the following incident when the hearer starts a first reflection on the sermon

He [the preacher] used this expression: everyone counts for Him [God]. And, yes, that makes you think, that everything, everyone counts. Actually it was about those children [in a service of christening], regardless who they are. Obviously, not every child gets the same opportunities. But He values them all equally. Then I thought: Daniel [her son] is also important for Him. We all are, but all children too. I have to admit that it worries me sometimes, but that's what I took from the sermon, that everyone is so valuable. You are not just anyone but for God you are someone. (Deborah)

In hearing the sermon the listener entertains the divine-human relationship. In other words, in hearing the sermon faith in God is awakened, stimulated, challenged or even created. In fact, the incident from the interview with Deborah illustrates something that virtually permeates the data in this study: though listeners are very much interested in the preacher's opinion, listening foremost entails how they view themselves, their situation, even the world, in terms of God, the Christian tradition and the Scriptures. When asked about a sermon, they talk about their faith. More broadly, in hearing a sermon listeners start thinking about their lives religiously, what their everyday life looks like from the perspective of the Scriptures, how they have to act according to the internal normativity of the Christian faith, and what it means to trust God in the midst of sorrow. These are the things that really matter in hearing sermons. In listening the hearer's faith in God is shaped in his or her current life-situation. Hearing a sermon is about how the listener grasps the Scriptures, holds on to the promises of the gospel, or finds himself at home in the gospel-narratives. In other words,

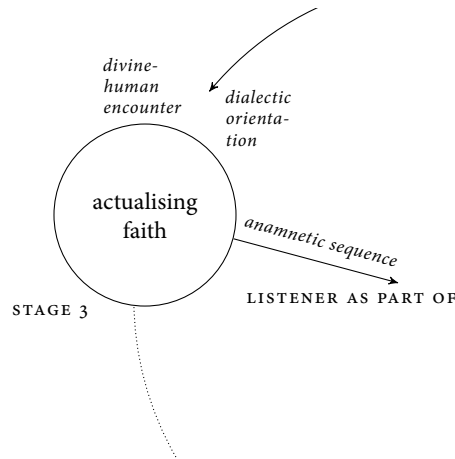


Figure 10.1 Actualising faith

in hearing a sermon faith becomes ‘actualised’. This actualisation of faith in listening has various dimensions and aspects.

The predicate ‘actualising’ points beyond a more ‘possessive’ understanding of faith (faith as habit or *habitus*¹) to a more dynamic reality—sometimes it is there, at other times it is hidden under the worries of life. Preaching helps listeners to interact with their own faith. Faith becomes an actual reality, again, or is kept alive through the preaching event. In the regular practice of churchgoing faith in God is entertained, stimulated and challenged. The notion ‘actualising faith’ seems very promising to pursue the study of sermon reception in order to understand how sermons work (in a descriptive way) and to rethink the improvement of preaching and listening (in a normative way).² More important, however, is its theoretical promise: it represents the third stage in which the process of getting religiously involved terminates. Actualising faith is not just *actualistic* in the sense that there are special moments that have revelatory qualities only, nor is it *actual* in the sense that faith always exists in the same way. Actualising, however, does have a durative dimension, between moments of new insights and a continuing sequence of listening that keeps alive faith as something that needs nourishment (section 10.2).

Besides the durative dimension, there are two other dimensions of actualising faith. First, faith has a dialectic orientation that moves between the here-and-now life on the one hand and the eschatological reality of God’s existence,

1. Cf. F. G. Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 92–102. Also see M. Wisse, ‘Habitus Fidei. An Essay on the History of a Concept’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 56 (2003).

2. See further, Chapter 11.

his kingdom to come, and the ultimate future on the other hand (section 10.3). Secondly, actualisation of faith is characterized by a divine-human encounter, specifically when hearing the sermon consists of an affirmative or critical experience (section 10.4). Eventually, I discuss how actualising faith relates to other models that explain ‘how sermons work’ and attempts to integrate the three dimensions by distinguishing between five basic modes of actualising faith, each based upon a different cross-tabulation of the three dimensions of duration, dialectics and encounter (section 10.5).

10.2 DURATION OF ACTUALISING FAITH

As pointed out in Chapter 4, the sermon listening incidents in the interviews are either very specific, about a specific moment in listening—a moment in which ‘something happened’—or they are rather general, about the ‘usual’ way of listening. The differences between these sermon-listening-incidents point to two interesting characteristics of actualising faith. First, there are moments in the sermon, or specific sermons that interrupt the regular pattern of listening. A new insight breaks through, a new resolvment is being made. Many, not all, listeners report one or more of these moments of illumination (section 10.2.1). On the other hand, there is the long-term exposure to the preached Scriptures and the Gospel of Christ. In hearing sermons the believer keeps the faith and cultivates religious beliefs (section 10.2.2). These two aspects indicate the ‘duration’ of actualising: actualising has a momentary and a sequential aspect.

10.2.1 Insights of faith: the illuminative moment

Actualising faith takes place in various moments. These moments are characterized by a certain ‘givenness’ and provide the listener with new insights such as a new commitment to the gospel, a new understanding of the Scriptures or a new relationship to God. One listener calls them ‘precious moments’: unexpected, given insights that have not been arranged by the listener. Since listeners use visual metaphors to explain what they mean (see the examples below: you see it again, you see something from God), ‘illumination’ is a fitting theological term to capture this new, unexpected, givenness as aspect of actualising faith. A first articulation of this concept was ‘revelatory moments’ to stress its givenness. ‘Illumination’ does better justice to the visual language of the listener.³

3. See section 5.2.4. The notion of ‘revelatory moment’ has been discussed in earlier publications, F. G. Immink and T. T. J. Pleizier, ‘Research in Homiletics’, in: A. Grözinger and K. Ho Soon, editors, *Preaching as Shaping Experience in a World of Conflict*. Volume 5, (Singapore, 2005); F. G. Immink and T. T. J. Pleizier, ‘Theological Concepts in Empirical Homiletics’, in: *Annual Meeting Academy of Homiletics*. Volume 40, (Williamsburg, VA, 2005).

A NEW UNDERSTANDING, COMMITMENT, OR RELATION Illuminative insights are not just phenomenal experiences or feelings. Hearers express the wish to hear new things. This longing for something 'new' is closely connected to the educational function of preaching. Listeners are motivated to accumulate knowledge of the Christian faith, to better understand the message of the Bible, to act more according to the gospel, or acquire a more concrete understanding of how faith is lived in the current situation. Yet as a cognitive insight, the educational function is only one of three basic forms in which something new is presented to the listener's mind or how a new perspective emerges for the listener in hearing the sermon. In the interviews listeners regularly touch upon issues such as, the sermon provided them with new ideas to contemplate (cognitive understanding), new directions to take in their life of faith (behavioural commitment), or a new way of getting to know God (affective relation).

In the midst of recent sorrow, Kathy finds a new relation to God. I interviewed her in december, just before Christmas. After she has told her story about her cheating husband, I ask her about listening to the sermon last Sunday. Then she articulates how, through hearing the sermon, she understands the reality of Christ's incarnation in a fresh way. The rotten world she inhabits is the same world Christ wanted to be part of and the sermon conveys to her a new relation to Christ:

I—What was listening like for you, last Sunday?

Kathy—Well, that was very strong, you know. The feeling that Jesus came to this world for us. You know, that hadn't be so strong for me as other years.

I—Stronger than previously?

Kathy—Yes, you know. That he really came into this rotten world, where all these terrible things happen. All those wrong choices human beings make themselves. Yes. Really, that's what he came for. Yes. I feel that now, very different than all those other times. (Kathy)

Incidents from other interviews may not be that intense yet they show a similar pattern: in hearing the listener is challenged to adopt a new commitment to living a Christian life, the sermon provides the listener with a new perspective to the Christian faith, or in the preaching event the listener is put into a new relationship with God. Hence new insights relate to behavioural (a new commitment), affective (a new relationship), or cognitive (a new understanding) aspects of faith.

PRECIOUS MOMENTS The unexpected, phenomenal and momentary appears in the following incident. Caroline tells about a sermon on 1 Cor. 15 where St. Paul compares Christ's resurrection, the resurrection of the dead at the end of history, with a seed that is hidden in the earth. The listener summarizes the listening experience as a serendipitous, unexpected moment of illumination:

Last Sunday. Very busy, the entire week; company in the morning, we had coffee with friends in the afternoon, and in the evening a prayergroup at home. So the Sunday-schedule was pretty full. At the end of the day you go to church, like something in between all other things and your mind circles around all the things you have to do in one week ahead. Completely on the level of this world, so to say. Exactly then, you are lifted up, you know that's so great, because it gives you so much energy—and at the same time: a peaceful feeling that everything is going to be alright. Simply: everything will be ok. In a way that we cannot imagine. Like the flower: you cannot imagine its beauty when you look at the seed. [...] Yes, the sermon is a means that you can see it again.
(Caroline)

The phenomenal also appears in the following incident, in which listener coins the 'in vivo' concept 'precious moments'. A precious moment serendipitously occurs. This moment is associated with divine illumination by the listener, 'it comes from God'. The sermon 'teaches something new', she says at the end of the fragment. This incident thus gives a clear example of the structure of an illuminative moment:

Anny—Yes, that you can see something of God. Or, you have a precious moment.

I—What does it look like in a sermon? Do you associate a precious moment with a sermon?

Anny—O yes, certainly! A precious moment in a sermon is when things are said that makes you think like, well I have to take notice of something more closely, something that teaches me something new, or just that you're aware that God is very close. Yes, something that makes you feel close to God. (Anny)

10.2.2 Cultivating faith: the anamnestic sequence

Illuminative insights are condensed moments in time. Actualising faith, however, has an aspect of continuity, namely its anamnestic sequence. The moments of 'new insights' are part of a larger moment of 'renewal of' or 'keeping the faith'. Actualising faith takes place as an ongoing cumulative process, the next experience builds upon the previous experience. During the weekly or monthly sequence of listening to sermons biblical stories are told over and over again and the confessional identity of the community of faith is shaping the hearer's frame of mind. This sequence is *anamnetic* in the sense that it reminds the listener of the reality of salvation, of the acts of God in the history of Israel, as recorded in Scripture, and of the story of Christ unfolded in the Gospels. It resembles sacramental theology, with anamnesis being that part of eucharistic liturgies in which salvation history (incarnation, Christ's life, passion, death and

resurrection) is narrated and remembered.⁴ It is the 'recital of God's redemptive work in Christ'.⁵ A particular eucharistic metaphor for actualising faith is used by hearers when they talk about the sermon as 'nourishment' or 'food for the soul'. Listening as anamnetic sequence actualises faith cumulatively, continually and communally. This durative aspect of actualising faith renews the common faith of the congregation, maintains the communal receptivity of the listener, and helps the listener 'making it through the week'.

RENEWING OUR COMMON FAITH IN CHRIST Actualisation of faith is not only about new understandings. Listeners who express the longing for hearing new things also stress the importance of repetition. Listening is hearing again. Important as the 'new' may be to hearers, listening is not entirely and only about hearing something new. In listening faith is also renewed. Hearers enter the world of faith that is already there albeit sometimes in fragments or in doubt. In doing so faith is entertained. Hearing the known is coming to faith again, keeping the faith. The sermon relocates the listener into a new world but it also helps them to dwell in an, at least partially, known world.⁶ The world that is projected in the sermon⁷ is the world of Christian faith, or more specifically, the world in which Christ is 'commemorated' by the congregation. Two listeners from different congregations, different ages, and with very different biographies agree on this:

Perhaps, I think, that I wish to hear about the Lord Jesus. That is what makes listening to a sermon valuable for me. I would like to understand how the text of the bible is related to Jesus and what he has done. [...] On the other hand, you need to hear it, even if it is not something entirely new, so that you do not doze off. That you start thinking, well, that's it, I think I know it all [...] It makes me happy when I hear about Jesus. The gospel is not supposed to be missing. Actually, that is why I do it [going to church]. It gives me joy. (Caroline)

4. In the sacraments visibly acted out. Cf. J. F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship. Third edition. Revised and Expanded.* 3rd edition. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), p. 233 and J. F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith.* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), pp. 104–107. Also J. Gittoes, *Anamnesis and the Eucharist. Contemporary Anglican Approaches.* (Ashgate, 2008).

5. See R. P. Byars, *Lift Your Hearts on High. Eucharistic Prayer in the Reformed Tradition.* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 77, for the various liturgical texts, see also pp. 43–54. Cf. also O. Richter, *Anamnesis - Mimesis - Epiklesis. Der Gottesdienst als Ort religiöser Bildung.* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005).

6. For an homiletic extrapolation of the sermon as 'a world of faith', see section 11.3.

7. The notion of world-projection is developed in N. Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). The idea is applied to homiletics by John Rottman in his (unpublished) thesis, J. M. Rottman, *Doing Things with Words in a Sermon: Preaching as a Performative Activity.* Ph. D thesis, (Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto, 1996).

Well, that again and again I am comparing myself to and trying out, the life that Christ lived, why he eventually was crucified, and how that actually was a very unjust and horrible deed, indeed. But it gives me an impression that in this earthly life, in the course of life, we can only approximately live such a life, almost asymptotely, as I would say. [...] Testing, yes, trying out. So, what is the preacher saying, what is he reading, o, really is that what he takes from the Scriptures? O, yes. I need to read it over again. I always try to simplify it.
(Ronald)

Though Caroline talks about Christ in terms of enjoyment (the celebrative type of actualising faith) and Ronald uses the sermon to diagnose his own life of faith in terms of Christ (a parnetic type of actualising faith)⁸, both of them are cultivating their faith in Christ as part of the common Christian faith. Another good example is the well-known story of the Prodigal Son, 'you know it by heart' as Kathy puts it, 'and it is a beautiful story every time you hear it. And always there is something that touches you slightly different than the time before.'

MAINTAINING COMMUNAL RECEPTIVITY In Chapter 6, I distinguished between the situated and the communal receptivity of the listener. Situated receptivity is an inherent property of the believing subject, his defined situation of faith in terms of the trivialities of life and his relation to God. The communal concerns factors outside the listener's mind: preaching as institutional reality, belonging to a community of faith, and adhering to its confessional identity. The continuing sequence of listening actualises and maintains the communal part of the listener's receptivity. Believers have a framework of religious convictions that transcend their own personal opinions for they experience the sermon as a place where these convictions are articulated and restated.

One of the listeners in this study lives in a different village than the church she attends to. She visits the church in her home village just once in a while and though she does not have much in common with the folks in the town she goes to church, the sermons are closer to what she believes in. She shares the same faith with the people she does not live among on an everyday basis. That makes her coming back, because these sermons she tells in the interview, help her making it through the week. When communal receptivity, however, is not maintained week after week, listeners become disappointed or even frustrated. It is not just that their personal needs are not met or their individual expectations are not fulfilled but the sequence of actualising faith has been broken. In hearing sermons, our common faith is actualised, strengthened, restated and thus maintained.

MAKING IT THROUGH THE WEEK Sometimes listening is a very special experience, most of the time, however, it is not. There is a sense among listeners that a

8. About the several types of actualising faith, see section 10.5.

sermon is meant to help them through the week, practical, in giving leads and support for their Christian lives, and joyful, in providing a window towards the Kingdom of God, which strengthens them to continue in the sometimes muddy circumstances of everyday life. Listeners in rather difficult circumstances note how the sermon gave them strength for the week ahead; others just note that the sermon gave them fresh ideas to think about or challenges them to live in line with the gospel (again). The sermon is only for one week; next week there is another one.⁹ Kathy has heard before about the love of God. She regularly goes to church. Then she says:

With some sermons you know, you become very much aware of God's love. Yes. He comes closer, you're more directed to Him. It's more like, now I can *come through this week*. He is my Father. I must be with Him. (Kathy)

Making it through the week powerfully indicates how faith is actualised, how it is done by week-after-week exposure to preaching, and how the sequence of commemorating what they 'already know' strengthens the faith-relationship. Additionally, making it through the week with the help of the sermon, listeners adopt various additional strategies to sustain them in their everyday life of faith. Some listeners engage in a regular pattern of reading at home the biblical text on which the minister preached. Some write down the particular biblical text or a thought in the sermon. Others talk with other members of the congregation about what they have heard.¹⁰

The difference between actualising as *anamnetic sequence* and actualising as *illuminative moment* helps to understand how listening to a sermon is a normal practice of remembering, rehearsing and renewing the 'collectively shared memory'¹¹ of the congregation. Cultivation calls for illumination. The process of actualising may fail when there are too many new ideas to entertain or, oppositely, when there are too many sermons that are too repetitive. This balance is also connected with what we have seen in Chapter 7 regarding the dimensions of pleasure and functionality. Renewal of faith is connected with a pleasurable experience while at the core of the functional experience we find a longing for new thoughts and a new relationship. The renewal of faith in the ongoing

9. The concept 'making it through the week' is also an indicator of the post-exposure impact of sermons. Since I confine myself to a theory on involvement *during* listening, post-exposure impact is not further developed. Another aspect of post-exposure impact is 'treasuring up' (listeners keep records, notes; or they have special memories, around marriage ceremonies or baptism). Treasuring up points to a more lasting impact of sermons.

10. For other responses that fit this aspect of actualising faith, see M. A. Mulligan and R. J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), Ch. 9.

11. I borrow this notion from Michael Welker, see M. Welker, 'Who is Jesus Christ For Us Today'. *Harvard Theological Review*, 95 (2002):2.

confessional restating and expressing of the shared faith and the competence of the listener to identify with the sermon in a third-person or first-person plural way¹² may in the end prove to be stronger than the longing that every sermon needs to contain something ‘new’.

10.3 THE DIALECTIC ORIENTATION OF FAITH: ESCHATOLOGICAL VERSUS HERE-AND-NOWISM

Religious attention binds the listener’s mind to the realities of text, kerugma, and lived-faith. Accordingly, the perception of the sermon entails three dominant kinds of attentiveness: a textual attentiveness, a kerugmatic attentiveness and a life-world attentiveness. One central aspect, however, has not been dealt with before. Perception does not concern the question whether the correct intended ideas of the preacher are transmitted to the listener’s mind as accurately as possible. But perception is the process through which faith-related ideas are shaped in the listener’s mind. Listening awakens faith, calls forth a religious consciousness, and directs the hearer’s faith into one direction or another. This, however, does not happen straightforwardly; neither does it happen only momentarily or individually. The sermon shapes religious ideas in the believer’s mind within the context of the community of faith and through a cumulative process. Listen, for instance, to Eric:

The message that’s in this sermon is that your sins need to be forgiven to have eternal life and to have assurance that you’re going to heaven. This is not something that automatically happens [...] It’s not something you deserve, you know. You need Jesus Christ, he is the Mediator with the Father [...] Yes, that message should be told over and over again. I think that’s the core of preaching in our church. For me personally, that’s an important reason to go to that church. (Eric)

Preaching is embedded in the community of faith, it expresses the values and beliefs of this local Christian church. Eric points to a cumulative ‘effect’ and a continuous kerugmatic core of the sermons in his church. It even determines his choice of church. More important though, this fragment shows how this ongoing, cumulative, communal, and continuous practice of sermon-listening works: it shapes faith in such a way that the believer is connected to a reality that more or less transcends the concrete misery and joy of everyday life. There is a kind of dialectic here. On the one hand the listener points to a reality ‘outside’ the common dimensions of space and time; yet this reality is very real for his

12. See section 9.4.

own life of faith. This incident thus points to one polarity within the dialectics of faith, an *eschatological orientation*.¹³

The eschatological orientation of faith connects the listener to realities that transcend his or her everyday situation. This does not imply that these realities are not significant for the listener in relation to his everyday life nor that realities like forgiveness of sins, the sense of being acquitted by God, the expectation of the coming kingdom, and the perspective of heaven at the other side of life are means for escapism.

We must carefully distinguish between escapism in the sense of ignoring everyday life, its intricacies, problems and hardship on the one hand, and escaping the here-and-now in the sense of being aware that life is not limited to the here-and-now on the other hand. The latter is at stake when listeners reach out for a world to come, embrace the perspective of a future beyond the limits of earthly existence, or express hope for the Kingdom that has been promised. Central to the eschatological orientation of faith is the kerugmatic attentiveness of the listener. This leads to the following hypothesis: the eschatological orientation of faith is shaped by a kerugmatic intentionality of the sermon. In other words, the kerugmatic area particularly enables the listener to perceive realities that transcend the here-and-now condition. As Caroline puts it:

You know, we bump against our own limitations. That's the question he [the preacher] asked: what do we see? The hardship of life; we experience how things go worse. That feeling. And you think, like, if life is only this. But Easter is a reality. So then he puts forward the perspective of the future, and the Gospel of the resurrection. That speaks to me. Always. Then I think: this is why I come to church. That I see that this life is not all there is, but that it leads somewhere. That there is meaning to it. (Caroline)

The eschatological orientation that is expressed in this fragment practically permeates the data. Listeners talk about hope, eternal life, the conviction that things will turn out right, the uncertainty whether they will share in the redemptive purposes of God, or the security that Christ's resurrection provides a perspective on true justice. To illustrate the latter, listen to Ronald:

Our attempts on this earth are good enough. But it takes an effort to do so. [...] And then it gives space, then something emerges like perspective. Perspective to justice, to eternal life if you have to call it like that. [...] Space for justice. Jesus is in his place, Ascension and the Pentecost. That kind of hope and expectation. Yes. (Ronald)

13. A first draft of this section has been published in F. G. Immink et al., 'Locale contexten en geloofsculturen in de preekpraktijk'. in: *God in een kantelende wereld. Geloof en kerk in veranderende contexten* (Boekencentrum, 2009).

This segment illustrates that the eschatological dimension has a quality what the poet G. M. Hopkins has coined as ‘inscape’ opposed to the rather negative idea of ‘escape’.¹⁴ Everyday reality does matter yet there is more in it. Inscape refers to the movement towards a deeper, inner understanding of what reality is about and the essential being of things. Hopkins grounds his concept in the metaphysics of Duns Scotus in which the “thisness” of things (*haecceitas*) indicates their true individual essence.¹⁵ Hearing a sermon, according to the listeners in this study, is like making this movement (the metaphors are ‘lifted up’ or ‘seeing beyond this life’) from everyday existence not to neglect it but in order to understand its essence, and to find ultimate meaning in redemption and future hope as the Christian faith envisions. This aspect of ‘inscape’ is also found in literature, especially in fantasy and myth. For instance, in Tolkien’s great fantasy-epic *The Lord of the Rings* the reader is transported to a ‘heightened reality which was only dimly discernable in the partial reality in which we live in. [...] ultimate truth which J. R. R. Tolkien believed was God himself.’¹⁶ Hearing a sermon thus creates a sensitivity on the part of the listener for the reality of God, in which redemption and restoration, hope and forgiveness essentially refer to the incompleteness of creation. Yet without neglecting everyday life but with a deep longing to find its true essence.

The following sermon listening incident though is quite different from what we have seen before. The listener does not indicate that the sermon oriented him towards eschatological realities such as forgiveness, heaven, judgement, and future. Instead, faith is shaped *in relation to here-and-now existence*.

The sermon made me aware of specific situations that people may find themselves in, for instance at work. [the respondent works as a nurse] I don’t need consolation myself, but I can imagine that there are people who really felt comforted by the sermon. It enlarged my understanding for people who need comfort; it helps you to recognize this in situations of other people. (Jonathan)

Faith is acted out in the reality of everyday life and the sermon shapes this ‘here-and-nowism’ of faith. Jonathan’s own context is that of a happily married man with children, and currently rather without worries about the fragilities of human existence.¹⁷ Yet in doing his job he regularly meets people who have to

14. E. Wilson, ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins: Images of Transcendence.’ *Gerard Manley Archive*, (2003) (URL: http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/lectures_2003/transcendence.html); P. S. Fiddes, ‘G.M. Hopkins’ in: R. Lemon et al., editors, *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

15. For Scotus on the ontology of individuality, see A. Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 406–413.

16. J. Pearce, *Tolkien. Man and Myth*. (Ignatius Press, 1998), pp. 146–147.

17. This fragment has also been used as incident for third-personal engagement. Methodically, this second appearance of the incident demonstrates that interview fragments contain indicators

deal with difficult life-circumstances. Hearing the sermon shapes his faith in God in such a way that it connects him with the people he cares for in his daily life and he imagines how they may have been comforted to hold out in their situation.

The here-and-now orientation of faith takes on different shapes. For some hearers political issues are involved. The sermon should reflect on actual problems in society, such as animal welfare, violence and security. Others are struck by examples in the sermon that concern a Christian's lifestyle, his temptations and moral challenges. These are all incidents for how the here-and-now orientation of faith is shaped in hearing a sermon. Their faith is oriented towards everyday life, its struggles, beauty, and hopes and fears. Church needs to keep one focussed at the simple things in life, as one listener aptly puts it. Actualisation of faith takes place when people are pointed towards areas in the current situation of the world, when the sermon touches upon issues that personally bother them or addresses areas that are relevant for the Christian community in today's society.

If the sermon is about the life-world of the listener, the context of the Christian community in today's society, the actual issues of today, the problems and joys the listener experiences in his everyday life, then it is very likely that faith is actualised in terms of the here-and-now. In other words, there is a relationship between how listeners perceive the sermon's substance and how faith is shaped. Hearers who show a strong here-and-now orientation of faith in relation to the sermon, also report that they perceived the sermon in terms of its actual relevancy or its life-world relatedness.¹⁸

The orientation of faith is not shaped as clearcut as is suggested by the two extremes of eschatological and here-and-now. For many hearers the orientation of faith takes shape in a dialectic struggle between the two extremes. The eschatological reality of an harmonious living with God is largely at odds in the here-and-now situation of everyday existence. Life is lived out in the tension between the ultimate eschatological reality on the one hand, and the sordid, troublesome situations that we experience in the here-and-now on the other. When they listen to a sermon, listeners attempt to connect the two while they find themselves compromising, not living up to what they are supposed to as believers, or they try to figure out the tension, normalising the dissonance it creates.

for several conceptual patterns.

18. See further above, section 8.3.2.

10.4 THE DIVINE-HUMAN ENCOUNTER IN FAITH: AFFIRMATIVE AND CRITICAL

Pivotal in homiletic inquiry is the relation between human discourse and divine encounter in the act of preaching.¹⁹ From the point of view of the listener, the encounter with God takes place in connecting with the sermon.²⁰ The *ways* through which this connection takes place have already been discussed in the previous chapter on identification. The point of contact between sermon and listener is the locus for the divine-human encounter in listening: listeners have a sense of recognition or they feel a distance in relation to the world of the sermon. They feel confirmed or confronted. But confrontation and affirmation are not primarily experienced in the preacher-listener relationship but refer to the God-hearer relationship. Listeners experience a divine-human encounter, affirmatively or critically.

In general, affirmation and confrontation in communicative practices could be explained in various ways. Rhetorically, confrontation may be traced back to the language of the sermon or the persuasive performance of the preacher. Psychologically, confirmation may be conditioned by the listeners state of mind. Rhetorical and psychological theories provide powerful frameworks to explain underlying patterns of causation. For example, affirmation or confrontation can be explained in terms of social psychology by means of a concept like cognitive dissonance.²¹ This does not explain, however, how the listener's *faith in God* is confirmed or confronted in hearing the sermon.

Recognition and distance in identifying with the world of the sermon are better understood when we understand them religiously, and when they are specified as affirmation or critical confrontation. Listeners who experience a strong sense of distance, such as 'I do not live up to this claim of the text as the preacher presented it' feel confronted by the sermon. They experience a gap between their life of faith and the claims made in the sermon. Though not every hearer explicitly explains this gap in terms of a direct divine encounter.

19. See above, Chapter 3. Cf. F. G. Immink, 'Human Discourse and the Act of Preaching' in: C. Hermans et al., editors, *Social Constructionism and Theology*. Volume 7, (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002).

20. For the methodical generation of the concept of 'connecting with the sermon' see section 5.2.4 and 5.2.5.

21. L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. (Stanford: University Press, 1957). In communication theory, see S. W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*. 7th edition. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), pp. 126–129; for social-psychology, see D. Stahlberg and D. Frey, 'Attitudes. Structure, Measurement and Functions' in: M. Hewstone, W. Stroebe and G. M. Stephenson, editors, *Introduction to Social Psychology*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). Earlier sermon reception research is based upon this theory, see J. G. M. Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders. Sociologische exploratie onder katholieke kerkgangers in de Bondsrepubliek Duitsland*. (Nijmegen: Instituut voor toegepaste sociologie, 1975).

Yet the confrontation is certainly not a mere speaker-hearer confrontation but a religious one. Listeners who experience a strong sense of positive recognition like ‘Yes, that’s exactly what I believe to be at the core of my faith’ feel confirmed in the sermon. They relate the power of the sermon to the fact that it directs them to God. This is neither merely due to a mysterious divine act, the personality of the preacher, nor the substance of the sermon. We can only make sense of what claiming a promise, confessing sin, or experiencing the joy of salvation entails when these acts belong to a believing mind who reaches out towards God in an affirmative encounter, such as celebrating salvation, or critically, like repenting from sins. When listeners report that the sermon strengthens them in their faith in God, that it helps them to live a Christlike life, or that it renews their joyful hope in God’s future, they name aspects of a faith-encounter with God that cannot be reduced to cognitive dissonance or rhetorical effectiveness.

A closer look at these two values of the divine-human encounter demonstrates how the critical and the affirmative appear in the experiences of hearers.

For some listeners the sermon creates the uneasiness of entering a strange world, a world that is at odds with everyday life. The listener is not so much affirmed in how he relates to God but experiences an incongruency between his own faith as it is lived and the sermon. The sermon does not affirm his situation of faith, rather challenges and confronts it. In terms of sermon reception theory: the listener experiences a gap between receptivity (Chapter 6) and perception (Chapter 8). Identification with the sermon explains that there is a connection between listener and sermon, but in the mode of confrontation this recognition is rather negative.

Every time it’s a learning process, so to say. Listen, a human being has the tendency to stray off. The sermon gives a guideline to get into the right track. It’s human nature that tends to stray off and through the sermon Christ calls you back. I thought that was an engaging aspect in the sermon, that you say, well, it’s putting me on the edge again. You think about it again. So that it’s not dragging on. No, it’s very important to be pointed to truth while you’re thinking quite differently yourself. (Eric)

We see an honest struggle between the perceived claims in the sermon (‘the sermon gives a guideline’) on the one hand and the defined situation of faith (‘the tendency to stray off’) on the other.²² In between the listener senses that Christ calls him back on track. He locates the encounter with Christ in a critical experience. Further, this critical mode entails that the listener acknowledges a gap between the evaluation of his own life of faith and the gospel as heard in the sermon. The sermon challenges him to review his situation of faith. The

22. The ‘defined situation of faith’ is an aspect of the stage of opening up, see section 6.3.

religious self of the listener is confronted with a claim that challenges him to take a next step in the life of faith or calls him to an act of repentance. Eventually, this makes hearing a relational event indeed.²³ Though God is not at the centre of the action in the account of this listener, he actively engages in a dynamic movement towards the claims of the gospel on their lives. Something happens to them that they themselves understand as an event between God and their mind. Hence when listeners experience a gap between their own life of faith on the one hand and the world of the sermon on the other, their faith is confronted or, at least, challenged.

On the other hand, when the distance between hearer and sermon is not felt or when hearers do not experience discontinuity between their faith and the world of the sermon, their faith is affirmed. Affirmation takes various forms. It can entail consolation in times of grief, encouragement to keep going in the life of faith, or experiencing the joy of salvation. So in the midst of trouble John experiences a positive, affirmative encounter, which—with an old theological saying may count as communion with Christ (*unio cum Christo*²⁴):

Like that example of the high priest. Almost by definition, a high priest sympathises. That touched me. The empathy of the ultimate high priest, Jesus Christ. Yes, that's what I think: He sees me, He knows our troubles, because, really, many times I feel so troubled here on earth. (John)

The language is relational. The hearer does not talk about Christ in the past tense. In the here and now, he is strengthened, affirmed by the fact that he is aware of Christ's empathy in the present.

The affirmative encounter also occurs with an eschatological orientation of faith. Take, for instance, the following example:

Then he [the preacher] puts it in the perspective of the future and Easter [a sermon about the resurrection of the dead]. That speaks to me. I think, yes, that's what brings me here in Church. That I see that it's not about this life only, but that it leads somewhere, that things matter and have a purpose. Including the things you have problems with here. [...] I mean, that felt so *affirmative*, so much recognition. Like, o yes! (Caroline)

23. Cf. also H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 204–210.

24. Or 'mystical union with Christ', see for a definition R. A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms. Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 313–314.

10.5 HOW DO SERMONS 'WORK'? THE FIVE BASIC MODES OF ACTUALISING FAITH

Is there a single idea that integrates the experiences of listeners and gives a coherent account of the logic of working sermons? This chapter suggests how *actualising faith* may count as such. Three dimensions have been presented in the previous sections. Now, we turn to the final question: how do these dimensions integrate actualising faith as the third stage of getting religiously involved? In hearing a sermon, faith is affirmatively or critically actualised (the dimension of the divine-human encounter), it is part of a larger ongoing anamnestic sequence or made of different moments of insights (the temporal dimension of duration), and its orientation is dialectically shaped (eschatological versus here-and-nowism). The combinations of the three aspects of encounter, dialects, and duration typify various *modes* in which faith is actualised.

Basically, the five modes of actualising faith are grounded in the dimension of duration. Figure 10.2 on page 270 shows that its primary distinction is between the renewal of faith (cultivation) and the new insights of faith (illumination). The first mode is *cultivation of faith* (in the center of the figure). Its nature and structure according to the three illocutionary areas of text, kerugma and life-world have been dealt with extensively before.²⁵ Next, four additional modes of actualising faith may be illustrated according to a *typology of illuminative insights*, based upon the dimensions of dialects and encounter (the quadrants in the figure). We have seen before that in hearing a sermon listeners become aware of new insights, they experience a new relationship with God or are faced with a new commitment to live a Christian life. These insights, commitments and relationships can be compared with the dialectic orientation of faith and the divine-human encounter in listening. So, some insights are affirming and concern the here-and-now life of the listener; some commitments are critical in relation to the listener's lived faith; and a newly experienced relationship with God can be affirmative in relation to the eschatological promise of the Kingdom. An illuminative insight²⁶ thus consists of the combination of the values of the dialectic dimension (here-and-now, eschatological) on the one hand and the values of the encounter dimension (affirmative, critical) on the other. The two dimensions thus suggest a typology of four different illuminative insights. Hence table 10.1 presents the crosstabulation of the celebrative, comforting, paranetic, and converting insights. These insights are tentatively formulated and offer a

25. See section 10.2.2.

26. These insights may also be reconstructed as 'intentionalities' or a direction of the believing mind. For intentionality as combination of a referential aspect (such as the dialectic dimension) and a functional aspect (such as the encounter dimension), see J. R. Searle, *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

type of insight	dialectic orientation	faith-encounter
celebrative	eschatological	affirmative
comforting	here-and-now	affirmative
paranetic	here-and-now	critical
converting	eschatological	critical

Table 10.1 Types of illuminative insights

model for integrating the practice of hearing sermons religiously.

In the remainder of this section I briefly explore the five modes of actualising faith; eventually, I address the question how sermons work in order to answer the initial research question.

CELEBRATIVE INSIGHT A celebrative insight consists of an affirmative encounter with God and a transcendental orientation of faith. It directs the hearer's mind towards the Kingdom of God affirmatively. The sermon generates an insight of hope that extends this here-and-now life (transcendental hope) and the feeling that he is accepted by God beyond his own judgements or those of others (justifying faith). The following incident indicates such a celebrative insight; note the joyful tone of the listener:

You know after the sermon, I was able to sing, really. Everything is going to be all right (*eschatological orientation*). I could sing, really. The sermon, I can't remember precisely, but that 'Jesus suffered until the very end'. Such a great sermon, really exciting (*affirmative encounter*). I don't know, I was just able to sing. (Shana)

COMFORTING INSIGHT Comforted faith is a combination of an affirmative encounter and a here-and-now orientation of faith. In hearing the sermon the listener is strengthened to hold out in this life, he receives a new understanding, and feels affirmed by God in times of trouble. The sermon thus generates hope in relation to life in the here-and-now (immanent hope) and the believer is strengthened in his faith in God (encouraged faith). The following incident indicates a comforting insight:

A sermon like that helps indeed. Just this morning at work, I realised again that I have to pray: Lord give me the strength to treat these people correctly (*here-and-now orientation*). I mean, in my own way, I try to see Christ's example that when he suffered he did not become harsh (*affirmative encounter*). Yes I was really encouraged yesterday. (Elly)

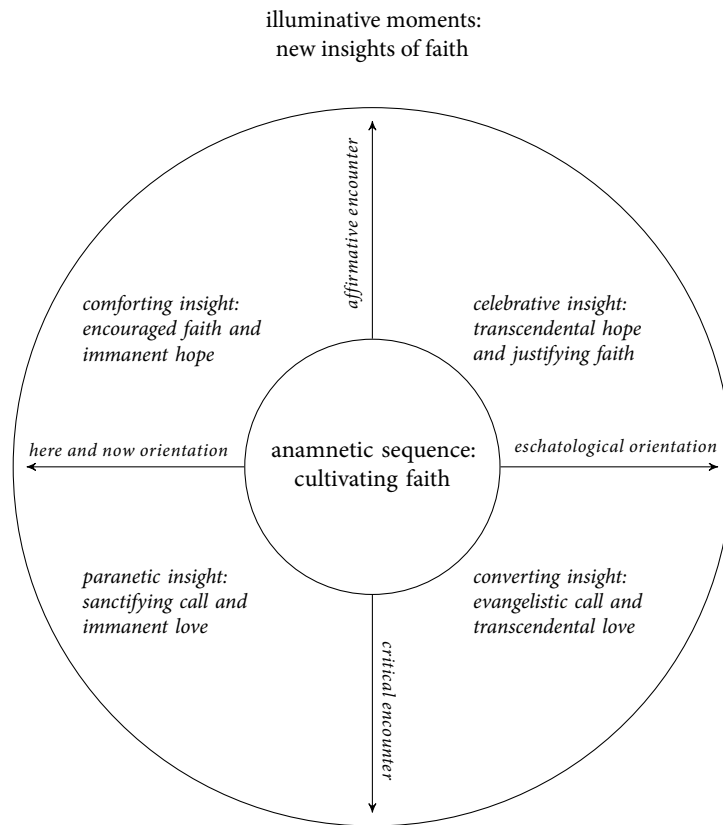


Figure 10.2 5 basic modes of actualising faith

PARANETIC INSIGHT Paranetic insights are characterised by a combination of a critical encounter and the human condition in the here-and-now life. The sermon provides leads for improvement of the Christian life and discipleship. Charitable behaviour, the love for others and the practice of Christian life direct the hearer's mind to the here-and-now life of faith (immanent love) and challenges the believer in growth and sanctity (sanctifying call). See the following incident for an example of this mode of actualising faith:

Like with the Scripture reading this morning, look I cannot measure up to Jesus Christ, because I am not the Son of God. No. Yet we have to suffer too but than I see it's a different kind of suffering than Christ did for us. He brought the perfect sacrifice and left us an example. Yeah, that we walk in his footsteps (*here-and-now orientation*). I mean, when I think of Christ who suffered that much, should I not be willing to accept some wounds in life myself as a child of God? (*critical encounter*) (John)

CONVERTING INSIGHT The combination of a critical encounter and eschatological orientation shapes a converting insight. This fourth mode of actualising faith is characterised by the challenge to respond to God's love rather than practical Christian behaviour such as with a paranetic insight. A converting insight therefore combines love for God (transcendental love) with a summon to believe the Gospel (evangelistic call). The following incident demonstrates its presence in the data:

You have to be reminded that you should not be too busy with earthly things but with eternal life so to say (*eschatological orientation*). How tempting it is, a human being is always busy to create a good life, to care for himself. That's ok, that's not forbidden. But it should not be overwhelming. I think that's very important, that you are pointed to that over and over again (*critical encounter*).
(Eric)

These modes of actualising faith offer a model to rethink the way we address the question how sermons work. Sermons that have effect, the German theologian William Wrede indicated a century ago—long before empirical homiletics existed—are sermons that bind the mind of the listener to substance, and create connections.²⁷ Though Wrede uses different terminology, he touches upon the dimensions of perception and identification in listening which I presented in the previous chapters. He describes features of a sermon (substance and creating connections) but these are explicitly connected to the religious involvement of the listener: a *sermon with substance* is a sermon that works on the attentiveness of the listener and a *sermon with connections* generates insight and recognition. Attentiveness and recognition reappeared in this chapter in terms of orientation (eschatological, here-and-now) and encounter (affirmative, critical), and indicate the structure of religious involvement according to the modes of actualising faith that have been presented. Therefore, sermons work according to substance and connection, or according to dialectic orientation and divine-human encounter.

Previous research dealt with the question how sermons work in either effect-language or interpretative categories. Effect-language, though, suggests causality, and positions the listener as a passive object in the act of hearing. In such a framework sermon reception boils down to the issue whether and how the sermon influences the listener's cognition, feelings, and behaviour. Further, effect-studies tend to reduce the listening event to cognition and retention. Even listeners, like some in this study, are sometimes caught in this presumed effect-paradigm when they apologize beforehand for the fact that they do not feel able to remember and recall the sermon. Despite their own judgements and

27. W. Wrede, 'Der Prediger und sein Zuhörer', in: *Vorträge und Studien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1907).

earlier studies in reception research, it must be doubted that retention is the main concern in hearing sermons. Therefore, certain strands in contemporary homiletics have become very sensitive on the use of causal language and effect-terminology.²⁸ Since it is too difficult to measure ‘effectiveness’, so the argument runs, we need another category. Instead, the sermon should have ‘meaning’ for the listener.²⁹ Listeners are meaning-making subjects and they (sub)consciously construct their own sermon out of the preached one.³⁰ Preaching is an event of meaning in which the biblical text is mediated in the context of today’s world and in this event the listener plays his own role as interpreter.³¹ The question how a sermon works, then, is hermeneutically or aesthetically answered. The former reconstructs the hearing as a process of meaning-construction.³² The latter places the listener in the center of an aesthetic experience and turns the listener into the creator of his own piece of art.

There are, however, a few problems attached to these contemporary reconstructions. First, they are largely the result of deductive—sometimes even ideologically driven—reasoning.³³ Hermeneutics or constructivism function as a larger theoretical framework and provide the terminology for theorizing about how the sermon works in relation to the listener. Deductive reasoning, however, forces the data into preconceived, even pre-empirical categories.³⁴ Likewise, the notion of ‘meaning’ is very much part of the “grand theories” of sermon-listening. From the hermeneutical reflections on the interpretation of Scripture and the interpretative activities of the preacher in preparing a sermon, the idea is deductively applied to the practice of listening. Further, these frameworks do not fully integrate the idea that hearing sermons is a religious practice. The paradigms of effect and meaning do not have sufficient conceptual space for a theological articulation of the various processes, aspects, and conditions that concern hearing sermons from a specific religious point of view. This may have brought H. W. Dannowski to his conclusion that it remains difficult to articulate

28. Recent German research inquires the attention-effect in hearing sermons. The study, however, does not theoretically redeem the notion of ‘sermonic effect’ though it shows that in limited ways effect language is relevant. See H. Schwier and S. Gall, *Predigt Hören. Befunde und Ergebnisse der Heidelberger Umfrage zur Predigtrezeption*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

29. In Chapter 1 I discussed this perspective already. See also section 8.1.

30. Engemann distinguishes between the sermon as manuscript (text) and the sermon as product of the interaction between the listener and the sermon, the ‘auredit’. Cf. W. Engemann, *Einführung in die Homiletik*. (Tübingen / Basel: UTB A. Francke Verlag, 2002), p. 172.

31. See G. D. J. Dingemans, *Als hoorder onder de hoorders. Hermeneutische homiletiek*. (Kampen: Kok, 1991). Also I. Reuter, *Predigt Verstehen. Grundlagen einer homiletischen Hermeneutik*. Volume 17, Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

32. This perspective has been discussed in section 8.1.

33. About inductive and deductive reasoning, see 1.4.

34. About forcing, see B. G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis. Emergence vs Forcing*. (Sociology Press, 1992).

the dynamics between gospel and situation, between Word and listener, into 'one theological and homiletical system'.³⁵

The question of this section 'how do sermons work' and the larger research question of this study 'what happens religiously in hearing a sermon' are finally answered with the five modes of actualising faith. Getting religiously involved brings about *new insights* in faith and is part of a regular, ongoing process of *cultivating faith*. It results in an actualised faith-relationship (stage 3), refracts in experiential, attentive, and existential involvement (stage 2), and it all starts with the listener who opens up to hear words that though spoken by a preacher, are received as coming from God (stage 1).

The next chapter puts these research results in perspective, it provides a model for normative reflection, and it gives a methodological advancement for further research.

35. H. W. Dannowski, *Kompendium der Predigtlehre*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985), p. 100.

PART IV

Using Empirical Homiletics

11

THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF LISTENING IN PERSPECTIVE

11.1 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS IN DISCUSSION

The main thesis of this study is that in hearing a sermon listeners become religiously involved. The previous chapters have fleshed out its various stages, dimensions and properties. Consequently, the research problem to which this study provides an answer may be formulated in these terms¹: it is a problem for listeners to get religiously involved; they attempt to do this by opening up and dwelling in the sermon, and actualising faith. The hearer's concern can be further detailed: opening up concerns the ability of the listener to become receptive to the sermon and depends upon three factors, worship (liturgical receptivity), the congregation (communal receptivity) and the individual situation of the listener (situated receptivity). Next, dwelling in the sermon may become problematic if listeners are unable to perceive the sermon and to develop one of the various kinds of attentiveness (textual, actual or kerugmatic), or fail to identify with the world of the sermon (through either the sermon's symbolic-narrative world or the religious personality of the preacher), or lack either of the basic experiential attitudes towards the sermon (pleasure or function). This multifaceted problem both reduces the numerous variables mentioned in other publications into a few fitting and relevant aspects, and provides a nuanced framework to analyse the contemporary situation of preaching and listening.

This empirical-religious reconstruction of the practice of hearing sermons differs from other theological, rhetorical, or postmodern-aesthetic approaches to preaching. The theological reconstruction of listening in terms of 'hearing God's Word in the sermon' has been very influential in Protestant thought.²

1. For the issue of the research problem, see section 1.4.1.

2. Amply documented in C. Stark, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek*

Its importance lies in the fact that it undeniably deals with preaching as a religious event yet its underlying 'sacramental' assumption that the preacher's words somehow count as 'God's Word' does not provide a satisfactory framework for understanding the practice of 'real' listening. Additionally, this study explains how the community of faith is 'bearer of God's Word' as much as the preacher's words at the moment of preaching. More precisely, the fact that the preacher's words are heard as God's Word is also due to the fact that in all three stages of getting religiously involved, hearers are part of a congregation of believers: in opening up because of the communal receptivity³, in dwelling in the sermon because of third-person engagement⁴, and in actualising faith because of the anamnestic sequence.⁵ Next, rhetorical approaches frame listening in the language of 'persuasion'.⁶ What textual structures or authoritative stands, ethical, passionate or logical arguments contribute to getting across the religious message of the sermon? This focus on messages, structures, or passionate preachers, however, fails to acknowledge that the main concern for listeners is primarily what religious realities they are able to perceive or how they can identify with the world of the sermon rather than the communicative intentions of the preacher.⁷ Finally, postmodern-aesthetic approaches to preaching reconstruct the preaching event in terms of open pieces of art ('installations') that invite the listener to participate in creating the sermon in order to construct their own interpretations and meanings.⁸ Its spatial metaphor for the sermon (*Deutungsraum*⁹) fits the empirical reconstruction in this study that listeners experience the sermon as meditative environment. On the other hand, the listening experience is less individualistic than some aesthetic approaches seem to suggest; nor does its constructionist epistemology do justice to the fact that for hearers a reality is at stake in the sermon that moves beyond their own ideals and subjective interpretations. The pleasure of the listening experience depends to a great extent on the commonality that is built in the sermon between the listener's faith and the references to God and salvation in the sermon.¹⁰

naar de preek als Woord van God. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005).

3. See section 6.4.

4. See section 9.4.2.

5. See section 10.2.2. Figure 5.5 on page 153 puts the congregation in the center of the process of listening.

6. L. L. Hogan and R. Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation. Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); J. S. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners. Homiletical Case Studies*. Volume 1, Channels of Listening. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

7. See Chapter 8 and 9.

8. Garhammer, E. and Schöttler, H.-G., editors, *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk. Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik*. (München: Don Bosco, 1998).

9. F. Wittekind, 'Predigt als Deutungsraum. Zum Wortverständnis protestantischer Predigt'. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 6 (2002):1.

10. See section 7.4.

This chapter discusses a few additional aspects with regard to constructing Grounded Theory in the field of theology. First, the debate on *normativity* in empirical-theological theory is pursued into the next level. Earlier I criticised two views of normativity, normativity as part of a pre-empirical theoretical framework prior to empirical research, and normativity as theological reflection after empirical research.¹¹ In providing an empirical theory of the religious practice of hearing sermons, the question of good listening emerges a normative issue. Based upon some insights in contemporary moral philosophy I argue for a valid inference of normative statements from descriptives. Hence, section 11.2 presents several metaphors for good and bad listening which demonstrate how the descriptive character of Grounded Theory enables us to articulate the conditions for a good practice of listening which in fact is an example of emerging normative reason, moving from 'is' to 'ought'.

Secondly, these considerations about good and bad listening call for a reassessment of the nature of preaching. So in section 11.3 I argue that preaching provides a home for homeless believers in a secular world. This model emerges from the Grounded Theory as it has been developed in the previous part of this study and takes its lead from the central stage of getting religiously involved, namely the fact that hearers dwell in the world of the sermon.

Finally, section 11.4 explores how this kind of practical theological research may function within the whole of scientific discourse. In order to do so I build upon Alister McGrath's proposal for a scientific theology that—according to McGrath—begins with the church as visible reality.¹² A religious theory of listening does not only provide a promising start for such a programme, it also does justice to realities that have become marginalised in today's secular world, which brings us back to where this book started: doing theology in the real world.¹³ So in the final section I gradually move beyond the boundaries of this study, based upon Barney Glaser's distinction between substantive and formal theory, and I propose an extrapolation of getting religiously involved towards a formal practical-theological theory and show how it may be brought into conversation with other relevant substantive areas.

11. See section 1.5.

12. A. E. McGrath, *The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), Chapter 10.

13. See section 1.1.

11.2 METAPHORS FOR GOOD AND BAD LISTENING

The previous chapter presented the religious impact of sermons in terms of actualising the hearer's faith. Actualisation has two dimensions, it has an orientation and it entails an encounter. Based upon these dimensions as well as its temporal aspect, we found five basic modes of actualising faith: comfort, conversion, celebration, paranesis, and cultivation¹⁴ though the question how to distinguish between good and bad listening has remained unanswered until now. However, once we talk about 'good' and 'bad' we enter moral discourse. The applicability of Grounded Theory and its practical use depends upon the ability to identify good and improve bad practices because a theory without any normative implications is neither fitting nor relevant. Though all stages and processes in the theory of getting religiously involved can be used to develop a normative model, I limit the argument to the stage of actualising faith. The two dimensions of actualising faith—orientation and encounter—can be used to normatively apply Grounded Theory. On the one hand we have a two-dimensional (or in terms of the descriptive theory: complete) kind of actualising faith. On the other hand, one-dimensional actualisation reduces the impact of the sermon to either an orientation or an encounter. By implication the normative model helps to develop a 'religious pathology' of hearing a sermon. Hence, figure 11.1 on page 283 presents both the one-dimensional reductions and two-dimensional types in two sets of images. Two-dimensional images for the listener are the hearer as sinner, pilgrim, disciple, or mystic. These images represent well-actualised faith. The one-dimensional images are the listener as client, legalist, gnostic, or naturalist and point to less well-actualised faith. However, before I explain this in more detail, we need an argument that helps us to move from descriptive theory to normative statements.

The theory in this study provides a descriptive framework to understand what happens religiously when listeners hear a sermon.¹⁵ But what does the descriptive nature of this theory imply for the normativity of the practice of listening? How do we decide on good and bad practices and what strategical features do contribute to the improvement of the practice? Is there really something as 'good listening'? An intuitive idea may be that when a listener is not able to dwell in the sermon, good listening is not likely to occur. In other words, dwelling in the sermon provides a criterion for 'good listening'. But does this mixture of 'fact' (dwelling in the sermon) and 'value' (good listening) count as a morally valid argument?

14. See table 10.1 and figure 10.2.

15. See the research question in section 1.4.1, also see the discussion on description and explanation in section 1.4.2.

Since David Hume, ethical theory is largely based upon the distinction between fact and value, no 'ought' may be derived from an 'is'. Using this distinction Hume argues that evaluative terms cannot be derived from descriptives.¹⁶ The fact that things are as they are, does not entail how they should be or what actions ought to be taken to improve or maintain the situation as it is. Recent moral philosophy challenged this gap between descriptives and evaluative statements. Following Alisdair MacIntyre's functional approach to nature as well as his approach to virtues as dispositions towards the good¹⁷, Herbert McCabe argues that descriptive expressions entail normative statements and that it makes good sense to say that 'to be human is, in fact, to have certain roles and functions—so that we can speak of people being good or bad just as we can speak of them being good or bad at ice-skating.'¹⁸ Being good at ice-skating is not an aesthetic judgement only, but evaluates the skater in terms of being skilled and performing technically well in his role as a skater. Likewise, being human, McCabe argues, is fulfilling the role of 'being human' well. The answer to being a good person, McCabe unfolds his argument, lies in the fact 'that to be human is to be political, to be part of a *polis*.'¹⁹ So to be a good human being, is to enter well in community with other human beings. Or as McCabe puts it, 'a human being does not become herself by entering into community in general or into humankind, but by being educated into and responding creatively and critically to the tradition of her place and time.'²⁰

What does this entail for our theme of preaching and faith? Does something like 'good listening' exist? If so, does it involve certain skills in order to function properly as a hearer? Is good listening something that depends on the mood of the listener? Or does good listening entail some kind of objective reality, in the sense that hearing sermons is to fulfill certain roles that are intrinsic to the practice?

Following McCabe's reassessment of the fact/value distinction and his plea to accept an inherent normativity of descriptive terms, to be a good listener is

16. Audi, R., editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 260. This is related to what G. E. Moore has called the 'natural fallacy', namely that moral state of affairs or values do not have natural properties. For a critical discussion though, see W. K. Frankena, 'The Naturalistic Fallacy'. *Mind*, 48 (1939):192.

17. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A study in moral theory*. 2nd edition. (Duckworth, 1985).

18. H. McCabe, *The Good Life. Ethics and the Pursuit of Happiness*. (Continuum, 2005), p. 25. See also O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order. An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*. (Eerdmans, 1994), p. 17. For another line of argumentation, see J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An essay in the philosophy of language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 175–198. As far as ice-skating is concerned, after Sven Kramer's disqualification from the 10.000m during the Olympics in Vancouver 2010, one could argue that having a well-functioning coach is part of being a good ice-skater.

19. McCabe, *The Good Life*, p. 25.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

hidden in the theoretical rendering of the religious practice of listening. To be a good listener is *to function well* as a hearer. Empirical theory precisely does this. It frames the theoretical conditions, processes, stages that explain how hearing sermons functions as religious practice. The theory thus demonstrates that good listening is to be able to enter well in the world of the sermon and to get religiously involved. Getting involved succeeds, if opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and actualising faith function properly. So for each of the various stages 'conditions for success' may be formulated. In other words, good listening entails opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and the actualisation of faith. The good listener, is willing to open up and competent in dwelling in the sermon for actualisation of faith to happen. So in a sense the descriptive theory itself leads to normative statements because the descriptive theory indicates the properties of a *well-functioning* religious practice. Though numerous normative statements may thus be inferred from the descriptive theory due to its ability to provide the nature of well-functioning, I give three examples that only concern the third stage of the process of getting religiously involved, namely actualising faith.

1. actualised faith entails that the hearer's faith consists of a dialectic orientation and a faith-encounter. Therefore, good listening is two-dimensional since it combines both dimensions. This also suggests a counterpart, namely that lacking either of these dimensions suggests that the hearer does not optimally fulfill his role. Its characteristic would be that actualisation of faith is one-dimensional, either the orientation of the mind or the encounter-dimension functions.
2. a sound actualisation of faith over time includes a variety of combinations of the dialectic orientations and faith-encounters. Its counterpart entails that faith is actualised according to one and the same mode and is in danger of a all too trivial and predictable religious involvement.
3. a good practice of listening consists of a mixture of moments of insights and a continuous anamnestic recollection of faith in hearing a sermon. This prevents listening from running into individualism on the one hand and values the hearer in his subjectivity on the other hand.

Let us focus on the first normative statement. Actualising faith functions with the two dimensions of dialectics and encounter. The functioning in two dimensions does not only indicate the nature of actualising faith (its ontology) but it also creates an evaluation: when one of either dimensions is lacking, actualising faith does not work the way it should.

Figure 11.1 demonstrates both scenario's in terms of the eight listening images according to the two dimensions. Four images are two-dimensional. When

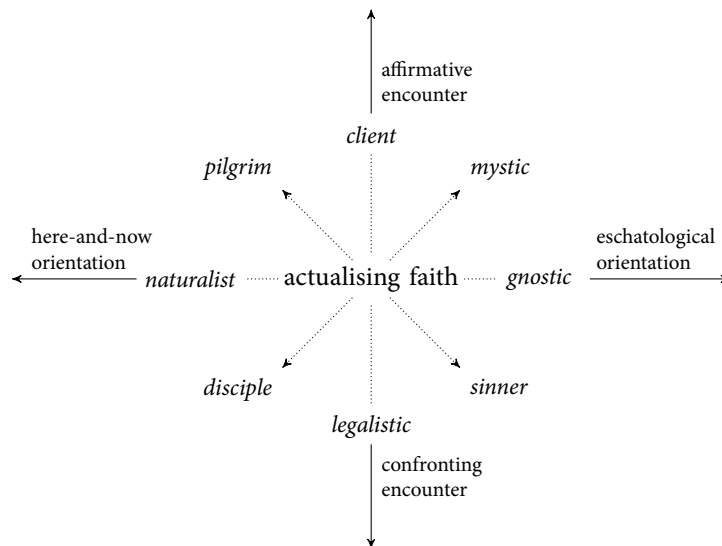


Figure 11.1 Images of listeners

confronted along the eschatological orientation, the listener's self-perception is of a *sinner* who is in the wrong (confrontation) in relation to God's eternal purposes (eschatological). The basic insight generated here is of conversion, the change of heart and life towards God's kingdom.²¹ On the other hand, when affirmed in the eschatological orientation the listener has qualities of a *mystic* who celebrates an unseen reality such as a union with Christ or God's promise that he will renew all things. The hearer feels confirmed in his future existence and secures his hope that one day it will come true. Affirmed in the here-and-now orientation, however, the hearer takes on the role of a *pilgrim* and feels strengthened, encouraged, or comforted in his journey through life in the here-and-now. The sermon generates a comforting insight on the part of the listener and it helps the listener to hold out in difficult circumstances and it gives understanding on issues in life and faith that create uncertainty or doubts. Finally, when the listener is confronted in the here-and-now orientation, his self-understanding is that of a *disciple*. Paraneitic insights point to areas in life (here-and-now orientation) that require closer attention to live faithfully, in obedience and discipleship. The hearer feels called to sanctification, to improvement in the life of faith, he is aware of the need of changing old habits into new patterns. These four images are all based upon a combination of the dialectic orientation and the faith-encounter.

21. Again, for the combination of the two dimensions and the various illuminative insights, see table 10.1 on page 269 and figure 10.2 on page 270.

On the other hand, however, when faith is actualised according to either of these dimensions in itself, the picture dramatically changes. If a listener only feels affirmed, without a bearing on the life of faith in the here-and-now or a view towards God's claims in the future, a combination of therapeutic and consumption images comes to the fore because his self-understanding would be of a *client* who is primarily occupied with the meeting of his own needs. On the other extreme, however, we find the *legalistic* listener who always feels confronted and has the need for personal improvement just for its own sake. The third pathological image would be that of a hearer who is so much occupied with the here-and-now life that either confrontation or affirmation in relation to God's salvation does not count. This *naturalist* mode of actualising faith has a strong secularising tendency. Finally, the other extreme would be the kind of listening in which the hearer is only interested in eschatological imagery regardless his own involvement in salvation either critical or affirmative. The *gnostic* is not only out of touch with everyday existence in the here-and-now but he also does not relate the sermon or the entities that are addressed in the sermon to his own life.

Obviously, these two sets of four images are rather outspoken and not very nuanced. Yet they demonstrate how descriptive theory leads to normative reflection on good and bad listening. The images that have been suggested here all relate to the general idea that the sermon is a world in which the listener moves around and builds an identity, either a sound one as a sinner, a mystic, a pilgrim or a disciple, or an unhealthy one like a naturalist, a legalist, a gnostic or a client.

11.3 PREACHING PROVIDES A TEMPORARY HOME FOR BELIEVERS IN A SECULAR WORLD

The empirical part of this study used various spatial terms for the sermon.²² The sermon has been dealt with as meditative *environment* (Chapter 7) consisting of three *illocutionary areas* (Chapter 8) with which the listener may identify himself or others (Chapter 9). Central, however, we find that listeners *dwell in the sermon*, acquired by experiential, attentive and existential involvement. This second stage of getting religiously involved thus provides us with an important metaphor for preaching, namely the sermon as *world*. In homiletics the world-metaphor usually indicates the activity of the preacher. For instance, John Rottman uses Nicholas Wolterstorff's aesthetic theory of world-projection to reconstruct preaching as constructing a linguistic world that consists of a series

22. For a premature articulation of the ideas in this section, see T. T. J. Pleizier, 'De Waarheid is praktisch. Theologia Reformata tussen Woord en werkelijkheid.' *Theologia Reformata*, 2 (2008), pp. 144–146.

of integrated speech-acts.²³ Albrecht Grözinger distinguishes between the worlds of the preacher, the listener, and the biblical text that meet in the 'one world of the sermon.'²⁴ Grözinger thus moves beyond the preacher's activity in pointing to the fact that the sermon is a fragile piece of art. In Grözinger's proposal the sermon is a *religious* world. Though aesthetics²⁵ and morality²⁶ are vital dimensions of the preaching event, a sermon foremost attempts to plausibly name God, which makes the sermon a necessary, a strange as well as an evident world. Its fragility consists of the actual performance that cannot be explained afterwards as it is like a 'space that is opened in preaching to welcome the listeners as invited guests.'²⁷

This bringing together of the story of God (*Gottesgeschichte*) and humans (*Menschengeschichte*) into one world²⁸, indicates another direction when it comes to communication. Previously, two alternative approaches in communication have been considered, communication as 'transmission of ideas' or communication as 'transformation of relationships.'²⁹ The world of the sermon does not primarily consist of messages that are being transmitted from a speaker to an audience, nor is the sermon world about transforming the relationship of the participants in the preaching event. Another, recently developed theory better fits both the insights in contemporary homiletics paired with the findings in this empirical study, namely the theory of *transportation into narrative worlds*. The world of the sermon may be projected by the preacher, from the part of the listener, however, it is a world in which the hearer is being transported into. 'Most people have had the sensation of being "lost in a book", swept up into the world of a story so completely that they forget the world around them. These readers are transported into the realm of the narrative.'³⁰ Transportation into a narrative world is thus

a form of immersive, imaginative engagement in a story. [...] Transportation is also likely to lead to real-world belief change; transported individuals learn

23. J. M. Rottman, *Doing Things with Words in a Sermon: Preaching as a Performative Activity*. Ph. D thesis, (Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto, 1996). Cf. N. Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

24. A. Grözinger, *Homiletik. Lehrbuch Praktische Theologie*. (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), pp. 157–176.

25. Cf. Garhammer and Schöttler, *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk*.

26. T. Luckmann, 'Moralizing Sermons, Then and Now' in: R. K. Fenn, editor, *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003).

27. Grözinger, *Homiletik*, p. 160.

28. Ibid., p. 170.

29. For the distinction see W. de Moor, *Grondslagen van de interne communicatie*. (Houten/Diegem: Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum, 1997), pp. 43–85. See also, section 2.4.

30. M. C. Green and T. C. Brock, 'In the Mind's Eye. Transportation-Imagery Model of Narrative Persuasion' in: M. C. Green, J. J. Strange and T. C. Brock, editors, *Narrative Impact. Social and Cognitive Foundations*. (Routledge, 2002), p. 317.

from the experiences of characters and may integrate the lessons from story events into their own belief systems.³¹

Transportation theory is originally based upon an idea of Richard Gerrig on the impact of narratives. Readers, hearers and viewers of stories are like travelers who enter another world and wander around in that world for a while. When they leave the world that they have been transported into by the novel, the movie or the speech, it appears that this has profound effects for the traveler who continues into his own real world.³² Homiletical theory, however, has not yet benefited from the hypotheses that have been put forward in transportation theory. This study suggests that transportation theory may be employed to further understand the practice of hearing a sermon. Getting religiously involved in hearing a sermon is very much structured as transportation theory reconstructs the exposure to various media, for both readers and viewers alike. The listener opens up (stage 1) and dwells in the world of the sermon (stage 2). In hearing, the listener travels to another world, resides in it, and in moving out, faith has become actualised (stage 3). The world of the sermon consists of three different stories, everyday life, the biblical text and the kerugma of Jesus Christ as embodied in the faith of the local church. Like 'all persons and communities dwell in story-formed worlds,' Christians, Eslinger argues,

dwell within one distinctive world that is disclosed within its biblical narrative and its storied tradition. [...] This world is both *intertextual*—that is, the world of the internal relationship of the Bible's text—and *ecclesial*—incorporating the church's life here and now.³³

In the sermon, as we have seen, the biblical and ecclesial worlds interact, the story of God and the Christian church are interwoven, and the sermon provides a *new world*. What kind of a world then is provided by the sermon to which the hearer is transported during listening?

Three opposite qualities may be derived from the theoretical framework that is offered in this study. First, the sermon presents a world in which the listener is invited to be at home albeit in the tension of the Kingdom, real but not yet complete. Secondly, the sermon presents a religious world against and

31. M. C. Green and J. K. Donahue, 'Simulated Worlds. Transportation Into Narratives,' in: K. Markman et al., editors, *Handbook of Imagination and Mental Simulation*. (CRC Press, 2008), p. 251. See also M. C. Green, T. C. Brock and G. F. Kaufman, 'Understanding Media Enjoyment. The Role of Transportation Into Narrative Worlds,' *Communication Theory*, 14 (2004):4; T. C. Brock and M. C. Green, 'Persuasiveness of Narratives,' in: T. C. Brock and M. C. Green, editors, *Persuasion*. (SAGE, 2005).

32. R. J. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*. (Yale University Press, 1993).

33. R. Eslinger, *Narrative Imagination. Preaching the worlds that shape us*. (Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 1995), p. 27.

in conversation with the secular world in which the believers live. Finally, the world of the sermon is characterised by strangeness as well as familiarity.

First, in hearing the sermon the listener finds himself religiously at home.³⁴ In particular, the listener's liturgical-immediate attitude in the hearing experience account indicates this being at home in the sermon.³⁵ The pleasure of listening is generated by the feeling of being at home, and is sustained by the personal history of faith of the listener and participation in the community of faith.³⁶ This home, however, has the qualities of a temporary living, say a tent (or tabernacle), that does not provide the final reality of being home, which is expected in the coming of the Kingdom as the dialectics of the here-and-now and eschatology orientations in actualising faith reminds us of. So the first opposite quality of the sermon is that it builds a communally experienced world and thus provides a temporary home for the church. Two metaphors of listening introduced in the previous section fit this quality because the listener as a pilgrim and as a mystic, has to hold out in life and reach towards the promised Kingdom. The sermon invites into a home temporary and provisional as it may be, provides language to celebrate the Kingdom that is real yet not ready, and gives strength to continue the believer's pilgrimage in life.

Next, the sermon creates a home for the listener between the secular world in which the believer lives as well as his own fragmented identity. The preacher's role is to guide the listener in the house of faith that is created out of an interaction between biblical, ecclesial, and everyday narratives.³⁷ This guiding activity of the preacher helps listeners to make the transition from the religious world of the sermon and the secular world that they live in. This indicates a major shift in the function of preaching in broader society. In older days, Thomas Luckman argues, the sermon provides a common morality and glues together the moral visions in society.³⁸ This function of the sermon as 'sacred canopy' (Peter Berger), however, has vanished in a secular age when the gap between church and society has

34. In order to prepare 'listener-friendly' sermons Bunnens talks about 'building the listener a house' but employs the metaphor of the sermon as home to indicate that listeners 'like well-prepared preaching'. Cf. C. Bunnens, 'Die Hörer', in: K.-H. Bieritz, editor, *Handbuch der Predigt*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlag, 1990), p. 172. On the other hand, Plantinga talks about preaching as 'bringing God home', see C. Plantinga, 'Bringing God Home through Preaching', in: E. T. Charry, editor, *Inquiring after God. Classic and Contemporary Readings*. (Blackwell, 2000).

35. See section 7.4.

36. Note the importance of feelings and emotion and the role of prior knowledge in transportation theory, M. C. Green, 'Transportation Into Narrative Worlds. The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism', *Discourse Processes*, 38 (2004):2. Also M. C. Green, 'Transportation Theory', in: *The International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Blackwell, 2008)

37. Cf. the three illocutionary areas that are discerned by the hearer in listening, see section 8.3. For roles of the preacher, see section 3.1.

38. For the moralizing function of the sermon in society, see Luckmann, 'Moralizing Sermons'.

enlarged due to the fact that many members of society have become unchurched even if this does not entail that they have become entirely unspiritual. In this context, the sermon's role nowadays is to guide the listener to express and live the faith in a secular environment.

Since this secularity is not so much outside the listener but also part of the believer's life, the sermon provides an alternative world to craft and maintain a religious identity and to find a home. Not to escape the secular world in which the believer lives but to find an 'inscape' in the essence of what this life is all about and the reality of God's promised Kingdom.³⁹ The listener is challenged by the sermon to live more according to the common identity that is expressed in the sermon. The moral function thus still exists but as part of the believing community rather than for the wider media-oriented society. Besides, as Henning Luther has stressed, the believer lives in a fragmented existence.⁴⁰ The believer's self continually encounters the struggle of a broken identity and needs the 'justification of the sinner'. In this fragmented life the sermon provides the hearer with a world to come home to in the justifying acceptance of God.⁴¹ Coming home in the sermon is coming from outside, the outside of the larger secular world to which the listener is sent back as a disciple, and the outside of the broken life of the listener that needs healing and forgiveness when the listener is confronted with his sinfulness.⁴²

Finally, to provide a home for the believer, the sermon is both familiar and strange. It relates to the here-and-now life of faith while simultaneously transcending it by projecting the strange world of God's eschatological kingdom. The familiarity entails that the hearer must be able to recognize the realities present in the sermon. The process of identification⁴³ demonstrates the centrality of religious recognition. In order to recognize the elements of the sermon must convey some familiarity, and the sermon must provide ways to establish this recognition, such as the personal presence of the preacher and the symbolic-narration of the sermon as linguistic piece of art. Familiarity though is complemented by the strange reality of the Scriptures and its embedded narrative of the gospel. The commonly confessed faith of the church as objective to the individual listener remains a strange world. The ecclesial narrative (Eslinger) provides a wider world of which the listener is both part of as well as becoming part of. This dynamic of being and coming home in the sermon, is indicated by the basic

39. The notion of 'inscape' is borrowed from J. R. R. Tolkien's reflections on myth and reality. See earlier, section 10.3.

40. H. Luther, *Religion und Alltag. Bausteine zu einer praktischen Theologie des Subjekts*. (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1992), pp. 160–183.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 171–173.

42. The metaphors of the disciple and the sinner are articulated above, see page 280.

43. See Chapter 9.

distinction of actualising faith, it is both renewal of faith as well as acquiring new insights. The dialogue of the sermon, its single conversational turn of a larger dialogue, is marked by the felt distinction on the part of the listener: the sermon represents my temporary religious home while simultaneously it invites me to come home.

11.4 BEYOND THIS STUDY

The theory in this study provides an integrated and theological framework to understand the process of sermon reception. Reception studies have been atomistic in the sense that they focussed upon one or two particular aspects of sermons, for instance, how listeners evaluate text- or application-centered sermons⁴⁴, how the various rhetorical qualities of a sermon engage listeners⁴⁵, how the personality of the listener influences the formation of meaning⁴⁶, or how attention develops during the course of listening⁴⁷, to name a few recent studies in the field of sermon reception. Compared to these, this study is less specific in the sense that it does not go into rhetorical or psychological details yet its scope is broader because it traces the entire process of listening and fleshes out its three stages, each with its own properties. Despite the fact that previous research the listening process also divided into several stages, this study presents the three stages of opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and actualising faith as they are grounded in empirical material.⁴⁸

The broader scope of this study also provides a model that can help to integrate the various other studies. Perception and attention are part of the stage ‘dwelling in the sermon’ as we have seen in Chapter 8; while the unique and personal situation is particularly at stake during opening up and in the sub-process of identifying with the sermon. Actualising faith makes clear how situated faith, identification, and perception of the sermon work together. Since previous studies did not distinguish between perception and identification—mostly because of a hermeneutic tendency in the initial theoretical framing of the studies—next research may be about relating particular aspects of the sermon, such as its aboutness, its rhetorical style or its intentions to explain the Scriptures, with the various processes in listening.

44. Stark, *Proeven van de preek*.

45. R. J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

46. H. Schaap-Jonker, *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

47. H. Schwier and S. Gall, *Predigt Hören. Befunde und Ergebnisse der Heidelberger Umfrage zur Predigtrezeption*. (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

48. For a more detailed location of this study among the other traditions in sermon reception research, see above section 1.3 and 1.4.

The ordinary churchgoer is becoming more and more marginalised, a tendency that by and large applies to Christianity in the Western world in general. The dominant worldview of secularism has two implications. First, religion is functionalised and when its substantial claims are at stake all religions in public debate are lumped together into one religious heap without differentiating between their specific claims. Secondly, despite the fact that the study of religion is popular nowadays, theology as a scholarly discipline that generates its own kind of knowledge is being moved into the corner of the academic world, its claims are rationally suspect, violent and exclusive. This leaves theologians with two strategies. They have to acknowledge the given situation and in order to move along with the developments in larger society they have to adapt their research programmes and move into a more general direction of religious studies.⁴⁹

Another strategy, however, would be to stress the particularity of religious traditions. The specific claims are addressed, researched and put into perspective. This study serves as an example of this latter strategy. Given the larger context, this strategy has an apologetic side to it since it defends the position of a marginalised group of believers and articulates its core beliefs in the larger academic world. The fact that preachers provide a home for the homeless in preaching finds a broader expression in the fact that empirical homiletics provides a rational explanation for what these religious people are doing in the larger context of the secular world. As part of 'scientific theology', to borrow a phrase from Alister McGrath⁵⁰, empirical theology explains how worshipping the Triune God and practicing the Christian faith works out as part of the real world. This does not count as a proof of God's existence—a topic of particular interest for apologists—but it reckons with his activity and brings to the fore how real people in real practices interact with a God who is real to them.

This study in getting religiously involved does entail some claims that challenge the secular worldview in the sense that it poses the existence of something that is called 'actualising faith'. In hearing a sermon listener experience some reality in the God-talk that is done in the sermon, they feel encouraged or challenged, they become focussed towards the eschatological reality of Christ's coming kingdom and their everyday existence is put into perspective. The fact that the sermon provides them with a world to dwell in has a reality that extends beyond the narratives and metaphors of the sermon's language. This is not due to the performativity of the preacher's words only, this is only understandable from an ontological commitment that is shared by the believers and respected by the

49. For the relation between practical theology and religious studies, see C. Hermans, *Empirische theologie vanuit praktische rationaliteit in religieuze praktijken. Epistemologische reflecties op de ontwikkeling van een academische discipline*. (Nijmegen, 2004).

50. McGrath, *The Order of Things*, pp. 1–20.

researcher.⁵¹ With this kind of empirical research, ecclesiology, as McGrath puts it, follows the ministry and practices of the church, since ‘the life of the church is already under way. [...] A scientific dogmatics therefore starts with the actuality of the church as a worshipping, witnessing, socially embodied tradition.’⁵² And there, theology begins. Empirical theological theory precisely does what McGrath argues should be the task of theology, ‘to identify the *phenomena*, prior to their interpretation’⁵³—getting religiously involved is such a phenomenon.

The addendum ‘in hearing sermons’ points to the obvious area of sermon listening, the combination of interhuman discourse and a divine-human dynamics.⁵⁴ Getting religiously involved, though, has the conceptual ability to be applied to other areas than sermon-listening. In fact, the three stages that have been discerned in studying the reception of sermons may be abstracted into a general practical theological framework. For instance, for practices of faith, it starts with the religious receptivity of the participant. Further, in getting religiously involved, the participant’s experiential, attentive, and existential involvement is at stake in participating in a religious practices. Other practices, such as praise & worship, pastoral counseling, the private reading of the Scriptures (*lectio divina*), personal and corporate prayer, using the sacraments, engaging in social ministries, or practicing forgiveness, can also be studied from the perspective of getting religiously involved. In terms of Grounded Theory a comparison of theories in those other substantive areas could lead to the construction of a *formal* theory. According to Charmaz’s definition a formal theory is ‘a theoretical rendering of a generic issue or process that cuts across several substantive areas of study.’⁵⁵ This can also be applied to actualising faith, the other important concept in this study. A formal practical-theological theory may entail that in other practices of faith participants become religiously involved. In sum, getting religiously involved may turn out to be a powerful explanatory concept that runs across various practices and domains. This can only be suggested here as a further line of research but the general idea is exciting enough to close this book with. As a first, completely arbitrary sample of data, may count the remarks by participants in a currently running course in our local parish that prepares them for their public confession of faith. At the start of the third session of the course, I asked them ‘what have you learnt this far’. Three of the six participants present

51. See for a general argument, section 4.4.

52. McGrath, *The Order of Things*, p. 225.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

54. For these notions see Chapter 2 and 3.

55. K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Sage, 2006), p. 187. See also Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K., editors, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Sage Publications, 2007), pp. 97–113 and further B. G. Glaser, *Doing Formal Grounded Theory. A proposal*. (Sociology Press, 2007).

replied with a statement like: 'it makes God and the Christian faith more real to me...' Hence getting religiously involved has a conceptual life beyond the substantive area of sermon reception.

Appendices

A

INTERVIEW DESIGNS

DESIGN 1: LIGHTLY STRUCTURED

introductory part	30 mins.
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- introduction (read by interviewer) and acquiring consent for recording the interview
- background questions
 1. Please, tell me, how did you become a churchgoer?
 2. When you think about a regular weekday, what does such a day look like for you?
 3. Is it important for your faith to belong to a church?
 4. In a church are all kinds of moments where believers are together. Could you name a moment that creates the feeling in you that you are doing something worthwhile?
 5. In some congregations people talk about the sermon after the service quite often. In other congregations this is done only now and then. In what way is the sermon being spoken of in your congregation?

main part	45-60 mins.
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- *What makes a sermon a valuable sermon to you?*
- consider the following topics:
 - liturgy: hindering or helping?
 - preaching-history: a previous minister, previous sermons
 - everyday life
 - Word of God: what does God do in the sermon?

closing part	15 mins.
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- I have a few closing questions
 1. If you would tell your minister something about his sermons, what would that be?
 2. Is there anything about sermons that is important to tell me, that we haven't spoken about?
- Thank you very much!

DESIGN 2: SEMI-STRUCTURED

introductory part	30 mins.
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- introduction (read by the interviewer)
- preparatory questions
 1. *preparation* You knew that I would come today to talk to you about the sermon you heard last Sunday. What was it like being in church while you knew this?
 2. *service* I wasn't in church yesterday / last Sunday. You enter the church, you sit down, and then, what happens during the service? (note: songs, prayers, readings).
 3. *afterwards* Did you speak with someone about the sermon after the service? Are you willing to share with me that conversation? Did you talk about the sermon at home?

main part	45-60 mins.
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- main question [sermon-content]: *What would you have missed if you hadn't heard yesterday's sermon?*
- focus on 1-3 important fragments by audio-recall
 1. Listen the fragment [audio-recall]
 2. What did you think during the service?
 3. How does this fragment affect you now?
- At what moment in the sermon you were unable to connect with the sermon?
- Additional questions [preacher's performance, misc.] – if not addressed earlier:
 - Was there anything in the sermon of which you thought: this is meant for me?
 - Suppose, the minister has promised something in the sermon, announced or made a deal with you? What would that be like in yesterday's sermon?
 - Please choose: this was one of the better / lesser sermons preached by our minister.
 - What's in this sermon that is particularly characteristic of your minister's style of preaching?
 - Could you say whether your minister himself was involved during the sermon?
 - What kind of clues did the sermon give you for your everyday life?

- Sometimes you hear a sermon and then you think: I wish my son / neighbour / friend would have heard this! Was there something in the sermon that you hoped someone else would have heard if they would have been in church yesterday?

closing part

| 15 mins.

- Is there anything you wish to talk about but that we haven't touched upon in this interview because I forgot to ask you or because it just didn't come up?
- Thank you very much!

DESIGN 3: HEAVY STRUCTURED

The third design was used for the five final interviews. This design is more theory-informed than the former two designs and therefore heavy-structured.¹

general part	20 mins.
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- introduction, acquiring consent for recording the interview
 1. Please tell me what the service was like last Sunday?
 2. I haven't heard the sermon myself and don't know what it was about. Please tell me how it was for you to hear this sermon?

specific part on the concept 'entering the sermon'	2 × 15 mins.
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1. I would like to ask you a few more questions. Perhaps these questions seem to overlap but the similarity is created to acquire clarity about how you experienced hearing this sermon.
You already told me a few things about last Sunday's sermon. Hearers differ a lot and have different thoughts during listening. From Sunday to Sunday it's different for yourself as well. *Please tell me how you listened to the sermon last Sunday?*
2. Sometimes you're more able to feel part of the sermon than at other moments. One sermon does include yourself more than another sermon. *Were you able to get involved in the sermon last Sunday?*

specific part on the concept 'rescripting faith'	2 × 15 mins.
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1. Sometimes people feel addressed by God in a sermon, or are aware of the Holy Spirit, or the presence of Christ. *What was this sermon like for you?*
2. There is this saying that sermons 'create and build faith'. *Could you describe what this sermon meant to you?*

closing part	15 mins.
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- Finally, I would like to ask you a question about your history as a listener and how this sermon relates to other sermons you heard before. *When you look back to this sermon, do you agree that this was a regular listening experience for you (it's usually like this) or would you say this was a special listening experience for me (once and a while it's like this)?*
- These are my questions. Perhaps you had your expectations about this conversation. *Is there something you would like to add that is important for you when you listen to sermons?*
- Thank you very much!

1. Wengraf puts heavy-structured between semi-structured and fully-structured, see T. Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing. Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. (London: Sage Publications, 2001), p. 61.

B

LIST OF CODES (OPEN CODING)

The cycle of open coding generated 285 codes. The code list is presented here. These codes were categorized in 4 descriptive clusters. See for the methodical procedures, section 5.2. The codes have been ordered alphabetically. Due to space limitations I left out the comments that describe the definition and usage of the codes in more detail.

activity: accepting	churchgoing (motivation)	elderly people
activity: applying	churchgoing (purpose)	enjoying Christ representation
activity: evaluating	churchgoing gives structure	everyday life-faith, relation
activity: following	climate (safe)	evocative language
activity: intentionality	community: association	eye-opener
activity: interpreting	community: ass. with group	faith (activity)
activity: receptivity	community: being a subject	faith (basic trust)
activity: resistance	community: collective	faith (biography)
activity: retention	community: expression	faith (church)
activity: selecting	community: noetic framework	faith (doubt)
activity: taking notes	community: participation	faith (experience)
activity: testing	community: shared experience	faith (function)
activity: usefulness	community: sharing experi-	faith (content)
affirmed in what I believe	ences	faith in Christ,
application of salvation	community: the other	faith, funct.: against negativism
assurance of faith	community: tradition	faith, function: behaviour
attentive to Scriptures	community: threshold	faith, function: imitatio Christi
background (biography)	concentration	faith, function: integrative
background (family)	concrete language	faith, function: liberation
background (marriage)	connection everyday existence	faith, function: obedience
background (religious)	context, culture	faith, function: perspective
background (work)	context, personal situation	faith, function: self-reflection
being aware of 'other reality'	context, postexposure	faith, function: therapeutic
being aware of communion of	context, secularity	form versus content
faith	contextual versus political	from Easter to Pentecost
being personally involved	continuity in l experience	getting new energy
believing versus explaining	depressed feeling versus truth	getting older
cheerful feeling	disappointment	getting to know Christ
Christian faith (identity)	distance	gratitude
church (institutional)	ecumenical attitude	hearing in community
churchgoing	effort of the listener	hearing is understanding

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hearing new things	p takes time	sermon structure: complex
here and now life	p translates God's message	sermon structure: converging
history of sermon listening	p unable to communicate	sermon structure: diverging
history versus order of salvation	p versus congregation	sermon structure: simplicity
illustration generates experience	p versus human being	sermon style
'I have that too'	p, competency	sermon content: appeal
'I find that interesting'	p, functioning of (positive)	sermon content: cliché?
'I never forget'	p, opinionated	sermon content: depth
imagining resurrection	p, person (positive)	sermon content: everyday world
importance (subjective p)	p, self-inclusion	sermon content: illustration
insight in the gospel	p's character	sermon content: p calls for cheerfulness
intention of p	performativity	sermon translates
intraliturgical focus	pers. experience with p	sermon-bible text, relationship
involving others in faith	personal sermon	sermon-everyday life, relationship
it's about me	personal situation	ship
kerugmatic intentionality	persuasion	sermon-content of faith, relationship
knowing the p connects	political sermon	ship
knowing the preacher	practical Christianity	sermon-topic, relationship
knowing versus believing	practical example	sermon-worship, relationship
knowing versus understanding	practical question	s function: awareness
l. feels resistance	proximity (listener)	s function: becoming personally involved
lecture versus sermon	reality	s function: creating expectation
listening intention (didactic)	receptivity, open for criticism	s function: educational
liturgy-sermon, relationship	receptivity, openness to God	s function: equipping
living towards Christ	recognizing	s function: explaining the bible text
looking after one another	relevancy	s function: holding out
meeting God	relief	s function: inspiration to act
meeting others	repetition in sermon	s function: mimesis
membership church	responding to the sermon	s function: perseverance
merry Christianity	resurrection narrative (text)	s function: seeing perspective
message versus pers. perspective	sacred moment	s function: testing
moment of experience	secondary listening	sermon: clarity
naming	sermon (affect of)	sermon: complexity
neighbours	sermon (positive emotion)	sermon: difficulty
neutralising negative feelings	sermon course	setting: children's talk
new understanding of the text	sermon cultivates faith	setting: home group
p against listener	sermon evaluation	setting: liturgical year
p assumes knowledge	sermon expresses common faith	setting: prayer
p connects first person plural	sermon form	setting: space
p connects individual	sermon gives energy	singing
p connects with a group	sermon hard to follow	singing (topic)
p connects with the congregation	sermon helps practice of faith	socialisation (religious)
p enters life-world	sermon language	subject versus predicate
p explains bible	sermon language: abstract	subject: God
p explicates questions	sermon language: concrete	tasks (in church)
p has heart for kids	sermon language: general	testing the here-and-now
p identifies	sermon language: terms	the power of thoughts
p is involved	sermon length	this is important!
p is perceptive	sermon makes me think	topic (content of faith)
p is vulnerable	sermon mode	topic: Christ versus activity
p leaves space	sermon mode: intensity	topic: conversion
p names experience	sermon mode: warmth versus distance	topic: eternal life
p names involvement	sermon performance p	topic: future
p reacts to the congregation	sermon preparation p	topic: God
	sermon provides language	
	sermon structure	

topic: growing towards Christ	topic: Spirit	unity of liturgy
topic: human existence	topic: this life	world of faith, language
topic: human-God, relation of createdness	topic: time in between	worship service
topic: Christ is the first	topic: trust in God	worship service, preparation
topic: life at the bottom	topic-sermon, relationship	worship service: safe environ- ment
topic: mortality	topical integration	worship, climate: cheerful
topic: old versus new existence	touching versus confirming	worship, climate: depressed
topic: order versus chaos	transcending everyday exis- tence	worship, emotion
topic: perspective	transcending the here-and-now	worship: expressing emotion
topic: pilgrimage	true	youth
topic: sin and forgiveness	truth versus honesty	

Note the abbreviations in the list: p=preacher, s=sermon, l=listener.

C

LIST OF CONCEPTS

Note: The list below contains the various concepts that have been generated in this study as a result of the methodological technique of constant comparison and the various coding procedures.¹ The concepts are preceded by the sections-numbers in which they appear as part of the larger theory. The larger process of 'getting religiously involved' is build around 5 concepts, and 17 properties or sub-concepts. The concepts are graphically integrated in figure 5.5 on page 153. They appear in the table of contents of this study at the levels of chapters and sections. That is how Grounded Theory is being written: the concepts and properties of concepts are drawn from the memos² and subsequently provide the study with the initial structure of chapters, sections, and subsections.³ Besides a brief definition of the concept, I give a few indicators for the concept in the actual interview data. These indicators are brief utterances of listeners or served as codes during open and selective coding.

OPENING UP

Central in opening up is the listener's receptiveness to the sermon. What does the listener expect from the preaching event? What motivates the listener to listen to the sermon? From what starting point does the listener enter the homiletic discourse? Receptivity is a socio-theological concept in the sense that psychological, sociological and religious aspects are intertwined in the personal definition of faith and the congregational affiliation of the listener. Hence these are the two core dimensions of receptivity.

1. For the details of method and grounded theory, see chapter 4.

2. For the role of memos in research, see section 4.3.3 and 5.3.3.

3. See for this methodical approach to 'writing', B. G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity. Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. (Sociology Press, 1978), pp. 128-141. Cf. also K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 151-176.

6.4 communal receptivity

Three indicators determine the *objective* or *outward* dimension of receptivity: the attitude of the listener towards preaching as religious institution, the listener's sense of belongingness, and the shared confessional identity.

6.3 situated receptivity

Two indicators determine the *subjective* or *inward* dimension of receptivity: the criticalness of the situation and the explicitness of the divine-human relationship.

6.2 liturgical receptivity

The liturgy provides the stepping stones between the first and second stage of getting religiously involved. It is locally and temporally determined by small gestures, brief events and the agenda of worship. Such as: when the children leave the sanctuary, when the preacher starts with the sermon, or when the Scripture reading ends with a congregational response. Worship provides a route for opening up; the listener is ready to dwell in the world of the sermon.

LISTENING EXPERIENCE

Opening up is followed by the stage of dwelling in the sermon. This stage shapes three kinds of involvement: experiential, attentive, and existential involvement. Its first subprocess is 'experiencing the sermon' and refers to the space of the sermon and the listening experience as a whole. The listening experience has intrinsic and extrinsic qualities and properties.

7.2 meditative environment

7.4 pleasure in listening

Indicated by aesthetic utterances of respondents like 'a beautiful sermon'. They point to the *intrinsic value* of the listening experience: listening is valuable just *because of* listening. This liturgical-immediate aspect of listening indicates that *within* listening something joyful happens.

7.5 functional listening

Hearing a sermon also as an *extrinsic value*. There is a life of faith *beyond* listening. This is indicated in remarks like 'a useful sermon', 'the sermon made me think', and 'the sermon challenged me to change'.

PERCEIVING THE SERMON

8.2 religious attentiveness (mind-direction)

The core of perception consists in the direction of the hearer's mind in generating and sustaining attention. Perception is about the attentiveness of listeners. Attentiveness is a socio-religious concept.

Communicatively it focusses upon the 'aboutness' of the communicative event of preaching. Religiously, it binds the mind of the listener to the text of the Scriptures, the kerugmatic realities of the gospel of Christ, and situations in everyday existence in their religious 'qualities.

8.3.4 textual attentiveness

8.3.2 life-world attentiveness

8.3.3 kerugmatic attentiveness

8.4 concentration

Attentiveness has an *intensity*. Concentration connects experiential and attentive involvement. This is indicated by remarks about the hearing experience like 'I was able to follow the sermon', 'I was very concentrated', 'I was captured by the topic of the sermon.'

IDENTIFYING WITH THE SERMON

Though empirically rather intertwined perceiving and identifying, nonetheless, represent two different subprocesses within the larger phenomenon of getting religiously involved. Similar perceptions may entail different identifications. Equally, similar identifications may concern different perceptions. There are two ways of identification: identification with the sermon takes place through the religious personality of the preacher or through the symbolic-narrative world of the sermon. It varies according to personal engagement: abstract, third, or first-person engagement.

9.2 religious recognition

9.3 ways of identification

Identification takes place in two ways. Hearers identify with self-expressions by the preacher, or with the symbolic or narrative elements in the sermon. These are indicated by remarks like 'I was touched by the preachers attitude', and 'the topic of the sermon was very relevant to me'.

9.4 first-person and third-person engagement

Identification does not only shape individual engagement, but also abstract and communal engagement. Listeners talk about others who might benefit from the sermon, or relate the sermon directly to themselves. Indicators are: it's about me, I had to think about him, I can imagine there are people who are comforted by this.

ACTUALISING FAITH

10.2 duration: anamnestic sequence or illuminative moment

Two types of indicators in the interviews point to a temporal dimension of actualising faith. Listeners talk about moments in which they

received a new insight or in which they experienced a new relationship with God. Actualising faith also goes beyond these individual moments and is characterised by a larger movement that concerns the entire sermon or even the entire 'biography' of hearing. It keeps faith alive in the retelling of the Christian story. 'This is what I come for', listeners say, and, 'You need to hear it over again.'

10.3 dialectics of faith: here-and-now versus eschatological orientation

The dialectic orientation of faith has two different poles: faith is directed towards the here-and-now life or towards some kind of ultimate reality. These poles are indicated when listeners refer to God's Kingdom, eternal life, ultimate existence and future hope on the one hand, or the human condition, everyday life existence, and political realities on the other.

10.4 divine-human encounter in faith: affirmative versus critical

In hearing a sermon listeners feel connected with God. This has an affirmative and a critical side. The divine-human encounter is indicated in the interviews by utterances like 'it made me feel sinful' (critical) or 'it comforted me' (affirmative). The two dimensions of dialectics and encounter shape a fourfold typology of illuminative insights : celebrative, converting, paranetic, and comforting.

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SAMENVATTING

EEN EMPIRISCH-THEOLOGISCHE THEORIE

Dit boek presenteert een theorie over *gelovig betrokken raken in het luisteren naar een preek*. Dit basale-religieuze proces bestaat uit drie stadia (zie figuur 5.5 op pagina 153).

Deze theorie is gefundeerd in interviews met Protestantse kerkgangers, analyses en conceptualisering. In de eerste twee delen van het boek (HOOFDSTUK 1–5) wordt uitgewerkt hoe een Grounded Theory⁴ tot stand komt en hoe de gevolgde onderzoeksmethode bruikbaar is voor theorievorming in de praktische theologie in het algemeen en de homiletiek in het bijzonder. Het derde deel van het boek presenteert het luisterproces aan de hand van drie stadia. HOOFDSTUK 6. beschrijft het eerste stadium van *ontvankelijk worden* dat samenhangt met de gang van de liturgie, het geloof van de hoorder, en de binding van de hoorder aan de geloofsgemeenschap. HOOFDSTUK 7–9 beschrijft hoe de hoorder *in de preek verblijft*. In dit tweede stadium gaat het over hoe de preek als een geheel wordt ervaren, welke religieuze realiteiten in de preek worden waargenomen, en of de hoorder zich met de preek kan identificeren. Het laatste stadium van gelovig betrokken raken bestaat uit het *actualiseren van geloof*. HOOFDSTUK 10 laat drie dimensies hiervan zien: een *duratieve* of temporele dimensie, actualisering vindt plaats in een moment, maar ook als een voortgaand gebeuren; een *dialectische* dimensie waarin de hoorder wordt geplaatst in de spanning tussen het hier-en-nu en het komende Koninkrijk van God; en een *ontmoetings*-dimensie waarin de hoorder zich bevestigd of geconfronteerd weet van Godswege.

INLEIDING

In HOOFDSTUK 1 neem ik mijn vertrekpunt in de ‘Real world research’ benadering van Colin Robson. Deze benadering is van belang voor de studie van wat zich feitelijk voltrekt binnen godsdienstige praktijken (§ 1.1). Vanuit deze aanzet worden drie perspectieven op het onderzoek beschreven. Het homiletisch perspectief beschrijft de wending naar de hoorder binnen de homiletiek. In het onderzoek naar preekreceptie

4. Voor de vertaling van ‘Grounded Theory’ in het Nederlands stelt Fred Wester ‘gefundeerde theorie’ voor. Omdat zijn benadering een eigen model met zich meebrengt, kies ik ervoor het Engelse begrip te handhaven. Cf. F. Wester, *Strategieën voor kwalitatief onderzoek*. 3rd edition. (Bussum: Coutinho, 1995). Dit is ook in de Duitstalige literatuur gangbaar, vgl. Mey, G. and Mruck, K., editors, *Grounded Theory Reader. Historical Social Research Supplement*. (Köln: Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung, 2007).

domineerde de vraag naar wie de controle heeft over betekenis: de spreker (communicatiewetenschap), de structuur van de tekst (semiotiek), of de hoorder (betekenisverleningstheorie). Dit onderzoek steekt echter in bij het feitelijke horen als godsdienstig gebeuren (§ 1.3). Het methodologische perspectief presenteert Grounded Theory als adequate methodologie voor theorie-ontwikkeling (§ 1.4). Deze methodologie staat de laatste jaren opnieuw sterk in de belangstelling. Dit leidt tot een open en brede onderzoeksvraag die zich richt op het eigene van godsdienstige praktijken:

Wat gebeurt er godsdienstig als kerkgangers naar een preek luisteren?

Het praktisch-theologische perspectief, tenslotte, plaatst het onderzoek in een intradisciplinair kader, waarbij de empirische oriëntatie een integrale component is van de theologiebeoefening. Het luisteren naar de preek wordt bestudeerd vanuit het eigen perspectief van de hoorder en brengt vanuit de religieuze aard van de praktijk een eigen normativiteit met zich mee (§ 1.5).

DEEL 1: HET VELD VAN ONDERZOEK

Het veld van onderzoek kenmerkt zich door twee dimensies, het tussenmenselijk discours en het verkeer tussen God en mens.

Tijdens het luisteren naar een preek communiceert een prediker met zijn hoorders. HOOFDSTUK 2 begint met een analyse van de vraag wat prediking is (§ 2.2) en in hoeverre prediking een vorm is van intermenselijke communicatie (§ 2.3). In het tweede deel van het hoofdstuk wordt de prediking als sociale praktijk geanalyseerd vanuit de taalhandelingsstheorie (§ 2.4). Het discours van de preek wordt beschreven als conversatie, waarin een gedeelde intentionaliteit ontstaat tussen prediker en hoorders, en waarin de hoorder actief deelneemt. Deze tussenmenselijke communicatie vormt de bedding waarbinnen iets ontstaat van een dynamiek tussen God en mens.

HOOFDSTUK 3 bespreekt drie belangrijke Protestantse homiletische benaderingen van het preekgebeuren als intermenselijke communicatie en als geleidende praktijk voor de tegenwoordigheid van God. In dit hoofdstuk staat het begrip 'dynamiek tussen God en mens' centraal. Als *kerugmatische* dynamiek, komt in de preek het spreken Gods ter sprake als gebeuren in het verleden. Zijn daden van heil, in Israël en Jezus Christus, worden in de prediking opnieuw genoemd en door het gedenken van Gods handelen in de preek, kan Gods stem vernomen worden in het heden (§ 3.2). In een *interpretatieve* dynamiek, wordt de tegenwoordigheid van God gezocht in het handelen van God in het heden. De preek probeert Gods handelen in het hier en nu te duiden (§ 3.3). In een *eschatologische* dynamiek komt het spreken van God in de preek naar voren als een beloftevolle toekomst, en wordt het Koninkrijk geopend (§ 3.4). Elk van deze modellen wordt geïllustreerd aan de hand van een preekfragment en beschreven aan de hand van vier elementen: de rol van de prediker, de religieuze functie van de preek, de inhoud van de preek en de veronderstelde hoorder.

De verbinding tussen het intermenselijke en de dynamiek tussen God en mens in het preekgebeuren, brengt drie belangrijke begrippen naar voren die helpen om het veld van preekreceptie vanuit een specifiek godsdienstig perspectief te ontsluiten. Allereerst heeft het preekgebeuren een *eigensoortige religieuze functie* voor de hoorder; ten tweede vertegenwoordigt de preek een gesprek tussen hoorder en prediker (*discours*);

en ten derde ontstaat in de prediking een *gezamenlijke godsdienstige intentionaliteit* (zie figuur 1.1 op pagina 1.1). In deze begrippen komen de intermenselijke en de specifiek godsdienstige dimensies samen; zij vormen daarmee de ‘sensitizing concepts’ voor het empirische onderzoek (§3.5).

DEEL 2: METHODISCH TUSSENSPEL

HOOFDSTUK 4 bouwt verder op §1.4 en beschrijft de methoden en procedures van Grounded Theory. In de praktische theologie kan Grounded Theory worden ingezet voor ‘het bouwen van theologische ideeën op grond van praktijkmateriaal’ (§4.1). Achtereenvolgens wordt besproken wat het betekent dat ideeën worden gebouwd *op grond van praktijkmateriaal* (§4.2) en hoe het *bouwen van begrippen* op een systematische en methodische wijze plaatsvindt (§4.3). In de beschrijving en uitleg van de verschillende methodische aspecten (coderen, materiaal verzamelen, en analyse) wordt gebruik gemaakt van praktijkmateriaal uit de interviews die voor dit onderzoek zijn gehouden.

Tot slot wordt in §4.4 de kwestie besproken hoe *theologische ideeën* gegenereerd kunnen worden vanuit praktijkmateriaal. De aard (ontologie) van het veld en het perspectief van de actoren spelen hier een belangrijke rol. Dit wordt geïllustreerd aan de hand van het voorbeeld van aanbidding. Het ‘zingen tot eer van God’ is zonder meer een intermenselijke en daarmee sociale activiteit, namelijk ‘samen zingen’. Tegelijkertijd veronderstelt deze gezamenlijkheid ook een gedeelde gerichtheid, namelijk dat God het waard is om geëerd te worden. Praktisch-theologische begrippen hebben daarmee een dubbele intentionaliteit die verankert ligt in de praktijken van gelovigen en geloofsgemeenschappen.

Daarna volgt in HOOFDSTUK 5 de methodische verantwoording van deze studie. De toepassing van de in het vorige hoofdstuk besproken procedures en onderzoeksstrategieën wordt inzichtelijk gemaakt. De inleidende paragraaf gaat in op de drie verschillende interview-opzetten die gedurende het onderzoek zijn gebruikt (§5.1). Daarna volgen drie analytische fasen, waarin de cyclus van gegevens verzamelen, analyse en theorie-vorming wordt herhaald.

In de eerste fase van *open coderen* (§5.2) worden vijf respondenten geïnterviewd uit twee wijkgemeenten. De analyse vindt plaats vanuit drie leidende vragen: wat is relevant in de data voor een homiletische studie; van welke sociaal-religieuze categorie is de data een indicatie; en wat vindt er godsdienstig plaats in de data? Ruim 280 codes worden geformuleerd en in vier clusters verdeeld. Het meest centrale cluster ‘de verbinding tussen preek, hoorder en heil’ wordt verder geanalyseerd. Hieruit komen 8 kernbegrippen naar voren: de vorming van geloofs-intentionaliteit; het intra-persoonlijke gesprek; het cultiveren van geloof; gemeenschappelijk luisteren; instrumentaliseren van de preek; aandachtig luisteren; afstand tussen hoorder en preek; en openbaringsmomenten in het horen. Centraal in de luisterpraktijk, zo blijkt uit de analyse van de interviews met de eerste 5 respondenten, is de ‘heilvolle verbinding tussen hoorder en preek’. Het vaststellen van dit centrale concept markeert het einde van de fase van open coderen.

In de tweede analytische fase, *selectief coderen* (§5.3), worden de concepten verder uitgewerkt in categorieën met hun eigenschappen. Alle respondenten uit de eerste ronde worden opnieuw geïnterviewd, uit beide gemeenten worden nieuwe responden-

ten benaderd en in een nieuwe gemeente worden contacten gelegd. Totaal wordt in deze ronde met 11 respondenten gesproken, met 4 van hen twee keer. Het coderen van het materiaal vindt plaats met het oog op het specificeren van de geformuleerde begrippen tot het punt van verzadiging (saturation) is bereikt. Dat wil zeggen, dat geen nieuwe, voor het onderzoek relevante, eigenschappen van de begrippen worden gevonden. Naast coderen en interviewen, is in deze ronde van analyse vooral het schrijven van theoretische memo's belangrijk. Hierin wordt de voortgang van het onderzoek gedocumenteerd, worden begrippen uitgewerkt en theoretische verbanden gesuggereerd. Aan het eind van deze cyclus wordt het kernbegrip 'verbinden' vervangen door twee meer relevante begrippen 'het binnengaan van de wereld van de preek' en 'het herdefinieren van het geloof'. Beide begrippen hebben verschillende eigenschappen, zoals de luistercompetentie, de gesitueerde ontvankelijkheid en het vernieuwen van het geloof. De eerste theoretische verbanden, zoals die van dimensies, stadia, en processen, worden opgesteld. Dit markeert het begin van de derde ronde van coderen.

Theoretisch coderen is gericht op het leggen van verbanden tussen substantieve begrippen (§5.4). De afzonderlijke categorieën worden met elkaar in verband gebracht en er wordt gezocht naar een theoretisch raamwerk dat de begrippen integreert. Een belangrijke onderzoeksstrategie is het sorteren van de memo's. Alle memo's (212 stuks) worden aan elkaar gerelateerd, door elke keer de vraag te stellen wat deze memo te maken heeft met die memo. Het verband tussen memo's (oorzaak, gevolg, dimensie, aspect, proces) is een theoretische code. In deze fase wordt het centrale begrip 'gelovig betrokken raken' geformuleerd als een basaal sociaal-godsdienstig proces. Rond dit begrip integreren alle andere tot gevonden begrippen als drie stadia van een groter proces: ontvankelijk raken voor de preek (stadium 1), verblijven in de preek (stadium 2) en het actualiseren van geloof (stadium 3). Figuur 5.5 op pagina 153 toont het definitieve theoretische raamwerk als uitkomst van het onderzoek. Bovendien laat deze benadering zien dat de theorie niet over een specifieke populatie gaat, maar over een abstract begrip dat een eigen realiteit heeft, los van de individuele hoorders.

DEEL 3: EEN GROUNDED THEORY VAN GELOVIG BETROKKEN RAKEN IN HET LUISTEREN NAAR PREKEN

Gelovig betrokken raken in de preek start bij de ontvankelijkheid van de hoorder (stadium 1), wordt gevormd als de hoorder verblijft in de wereld van de preek (stadium 2) en loopt uit op het actualiseren van het geloof van de hoorder (stadium 3). De hoofdstukken en paragrafen uit deel 3 zijn de uitwerkingen van analytische memo's die tijdens het onderzoek zijn geschreven.

Stadium 1: *ontvankelijk worden*

Hoordersonderzoek heeft zich vaak bezig gehouden met de hoorder tijdens het luisteren (hoe betekenis ontstaat) of met de hoorder na het luisteren (wat de hoorder kan navertellen). Er is echter ook een hoorder *voordat* de preek begint (§6.1). Van belang is in dit verband de ontvankelijkheid, of religieuze receptiviteit, van de hoorder. Deze ontvankelijkheid hangt van veel factoren af, zoals van communicatieve, retorische, psychologische, sociale en godsdienstige factoren, waarin opvoeding, leefomgeving, en

persoonlijkheid een eigen rol spelen. Zonder deze complexiteit uit het oog te verliezen, wordt in HOOFDSTUK 6 de ontvankelijkheid van de hoorder voor de preek uitgewerkt naar drie samenhangende aspecten: (1) liturgische ontvankelijkheid, (2) gesitueerde of subjectieve ontvankelijkheid en (3) ontvankelijkheid die samenhangt met de binding aan de geloofsgemeenschap.

De liturgie is zowel een structurele conditie voor het luisteren, als een ruimte waarin de hoorder zich voorbereidt op de preek (§6.2). De structuur van de dienst zorgt ervoor dat de hoorder wordt meegenomen naar het moment waarop de preek begint. *Liturgische ontvankelijkheid* wordt gevormd als de hoorder door de autonome opbouw of structuur van de dienst wordt meegenomen naar het moment waarop de preek begint. ‘Zingen helpt mij om mijn hart op te heffen naar God’, zoals één van de respondenten het verwoordt. De liturgie is echter niet alleen een voorbereidende praktijk, maar vertegenwoordigt ook een ‘dramatische gang’ waarin de daden van God te binnen worden gebracht en het Christus-gebeuren wordt gerepresenteerd. Dit kan in een voortgaande lezing, door de gang van het kerkelijk jaar of de herhaling van het liturgische gebeuren waarin liturgie en preek als één geheel worden ervaren. Respondenten maken in een interview soms nauwelijks verschil tussen wat er in de preek is gezegd of in de gebeden. De dienst als geheel vertegenwoordigt voor hen een realiteit, waarvan de preek slechts een onderdeel is.

De *subjectieve ontvankelijkheid* is verbonden met de persoon van de hoorder (§6.3). Hoewel opvoeding, persoonlijkheid, intelligentie en andere variabelen hierbij inbegrepen zijn, gaat het bij de subjectieve of gesitueerde ontvankelijkheid vooral om de hoorder als gelovige. De hoorder definieert zijn eigen situatie als gelovige ergens tussen kritisch en triviaal. In een kritische situatie is de hoorder zich extra bewust van vreugde en verdriet, of zit de hoorder met specifieke vragen. Door Ernst Lange is dit ook wel de situatie van de aanvechting genoemd. Veel hoorders, echter, luisteren vanuit een soort trivialiteit naar de preek. De eigen situatie spreekt minder sterk mee, dan bij hen die vanuit een kritische situatie de preek beluisteren. Subjectieve ontvankelijkheid heeft een tweede aspect: de geloofsrelatie tot God. Deze geloofsrelatie wordt door de ene hoorder impliciet en door de andere meer bewust ervaren. ‘Dat God met mij is, in alle situaties van het leven, dat is voor mij heel bemoedigend’, zo merkt een hoorder op die zich van de geloofsrelatie zeer bewust is. Beide aspecten maken van de subjectieve ontvankelijkheid een samenstel van gelééfd geloof en geleefd gelóóf.

De derde component, *gemeenschappelijke ontvankelijkheid*, gaat over de binding met de geloofsgemeenschap (§6.4). De hoorder hecht waarde aan de preek als een middel van geloofscommunicatie. Het ambtelijke en het gemeentelijke van de prediking zijn onderdelen van het institutionele aspect. Ontvankelijkheid heeft ook te maken met een gemeenschapsgevoel tussen hoorders: hier zijn wij als geloofsgemeenschap bij elkaar om iets te horen van de God in wie wij geloven. Naast het institutionele en het relationele is er ook een confessioneel aspect: in de preek verwacht de hoorder dat het gezamenlijk beleden geloof verwoord wordt.

Het hoofdstuk over ontvankelijkheid sluit af met enkele voorbeelden van de samenhang tussen de drie aspecten, het liturgische, situationele en gemeenschappelijke, in het ontvankelijk worden voor de preek (§6.5).

Stadium 2: *in de preek verblijven*

In het tweede stadium van godsdienstig betrokken raken in de preek, beschreven in HOOFDSTUK 7—9, wordt de preek voorgesteld als een meditatieve ruimte (§7.2). Gelovige betrokkenheid wordt in deze ruimte door drie processen gevormd: in het *ervaren* van de preek hangt betrokkenheid samen met beleving, in het *waarnemen* van de preek met aandacht, en in het *identificeren* met de preek met existentiële herkenning. Ervaren, waarnemen, en identificeren zijn drie godsdienstig gekwalificeerde processen die de hoorder in staat stellen om in de preek te verblijven. We kunnen deze drie processen preciezer typeren als godsdienstige ervaring, godsdienstige waarneming en godsdienstige aansluiting.

Aan de hand van het augustijnse onderscheid tussen genieten (*frui*) en gebruiken (*uti*) (§7.3), wordt in HOOFDSTUK 7 het luisteren naar de preek als godsdienstige ervaring gezien vanuit twee attitudes: een intrinsieke en een extrinsieke. Intrinsiek wil zeggen dat de hoorervaring allereerst een liturgisch-onmiddellijke betekenis heeft voor de hoorder (§7.4). Luisteren naar de preek is een esthetische attitude, want in het ondergaan van de preek geniet de hoorder van het heil dat ter sprake komt. ‘Het was een fijne preek’, zeggen hoorders dan. In deze esthetische houding is luisteren een soort rituele ervaring, waarin de hoorder participeert in de wereld van het geloof die in de preek, als deel van de liturgie, wordt geprojecteerd.

Daarnaast is er een situationeel-reflectieve attitude van luisteren, waarin minder de esthetische beleving en meer de bruikbaarheid van de preek een rol speelt. Hoorders moeten de preek kunnen gebruiken voor, of kunnen contextualiseren in, hun eigen leefwereld. ‘Het was een praktische preek’, zeggen ze dan. Enerzijds heeft de ervaring van heil in de preek dus een sacramenteel, direct karakter. Anderszijds roept het heil van Godswegen in de preek ook een reflectieve houding op bij de hoorder. Luisteren is niet alleen intrinsiek waardevolle ervaring, maar heeft ook een extrinsieke betekenis: met het oog op het geleefde leven.

De hoorervaring gaat over de preek als geheel. In de twee volgende processen van waarnemen van en identificeren met de preek, gaat het meer om elementen in of delen van de preek, die respectievelijk worden waargenomen als religieuze realiteiten en bij de hoorder al of niet herkenning oproepen.

HOOFDSTUK 8 gaat allereerst in op de vraag of het horen van een preek vooral een interpretatieve bezigheid is (§8.1). Het is een gangbare gedachte binnen de homiletiek dat hoorders de preek interpreteren en bezig zijn met betekenisgeving. Toch is deze opvatting minder evident als zij op het eerste gezicht lijkt. Uit de interviews komt een beeld naar voren dat in het horen van de preek de aandacht van de hoorder wordt gericht (§8.2). ‘Waarnemen’ is hiervoor een geschiktere categorie dan ‘interpreteren’. Betrokkenheid als aandacht benadrukt het feit dat een preek ‘ergens over gaat’ en dat in het horen het denken van de hoorder zich richt op realiteiten die betrekking hebben op God, de Schrift of het alledaagse leven in haar godsdienstige kwaliteit (§8.3). Zo beweegt een preek zich door drie aandachts-vormende-gebieden: de tekst van de Schrift, de werkelijkheid van het evangelie, en de realiteit van het hier-en-nu. In het luisteren verblijft de hoorder in de ruimte van Schrift, evangelie en de tegenwoordige tijd. Voor de hoorder zijn Schrift, kerugma, en het alledaagse geen gescheiden realiteiten, maar in de waarneming van de preek komen zij bij elkaar als de ene wereld van het geloof.

In het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk gaat het over concentratie als *intensiteit* van aandacht (§8.4). Er is een vorm van concentratie waarin een zeer betrokken aandacht wordt opgebouwd op de preek als sprake Gods. Hoorders vertellen dan over een soort gemeenschappelijke ervaring ‘waarin je samen iets van God ervaart’. Het geconcentreerde luisteren verheft de hoorder boven zijn eigen situatie en biedt een venster op het Koninkrijk dat voorbij de grenzen van ons hier-en-nu ligt. Deze ervaring kenmerkt zich door onmiddellijkheid en past bij de esthetische houding die we in hoofdstuk 7 tegenkwamen. Wanneer hoorders vanuit een reflectieve houding luisteren, heeft concentratie veel meer betrekking op het volgen van de lijn en het bevatten van de inhoud van de preek. Die moet helder en duidelijk zijn, bruikbaar voor vandaag. De logica van de preek telt in de reflectieve houding voor deze hoorders meer dan de poetica.

HOOFDSTUK 9 bespreekt de existentiële dimensie van gelovige betrokkenheid in het *identificeren* met de preek (§9.1). Existentiële betrokkenheid draait om *herkenning* (§9.2). Er ontstaat pas een verhouding tussen de hoorder en de elementen die in de wereld van de preek worden waargenomen, wanneer de afstand tussen preek en hoorder kleiner wordt. Dan kan herkenning een kans krijgen, zodat hoorders zeggen: ‘dit gaat over mij’, ‘dit raakt aan mijn bestaan’. Deze herkenning is specifiek religieus gekwalificeerd, want het gaat om een verbinding met heil van Godswege. Vervolgens bespreekt het hoofdstuk de 2 hoofdroutes of wegen waarlangs identificatie tot stand komt, de godsdienstige persoonlijkheid van de predikant en de symbolisch-narratieve wereld van de preek (§9.3). Religieuze herkenning, tot slot, heeft 3 niveau’s van persoonlijk engagement: abstract, derde-persoon, en eerste-persoon engagement (§9.4). Eerste-persoon (enkel- of meervoud) engagement is het meest relevant voor hoorders: het *ik* van de hoorder (of het *wij* van de hoorders) wordt aangrijppunt voor het actualiseren van geloof tijdens het luisteren naar de preek.

Stadium 3: *actualiseren van geloof*

Uiteindelijk, zo laat HOOFDSTUK 10 zien, staat voor hoorders in het luisteren naar een preek hun geloof in God op het spel. Preken kunnen goede inzichten bieden in de tijd, of boeiende verhandelingen van predikanten geven, maar voor de hoorder telt of de preek helpt in het vertrouwen op God, of de genade van Christus ervaren wordt, en of er iets van het Koninkrijk oplicht. Het begrip ‘actualiseren van geloof’ brengt dit verder in beeld (§10.1). Actualiseren heeft twee associaties: (1) op een nieuwe manier werkelijk laten zijn en (2) het geloof opnieuw een realiteit laten zijn.

Het ‘nieuwe’ en het ‘opnieuw’ van het geloof, vormen een belangrijke dimensie van het actualiseren van geloof (§10.2). Enerzijds wekt de preek iets nieuws op. Hoorders hebben het dan over *momenten* in de preek waarin iets doorbreekt van een nieuwe relatie met God, waarin een nieuw commitment ontstaat, of een nieuw inzicht in de bijbel of in het geloof van de kerk naar voren komt. Anderzijds is het horen naar preken voor hoorders ook een *voortdurend* te binnengebracht worden van Schrift en evangelie. Hier is een sacramenteel aspect aan te wijzen, in de zin dat het horen van de preek een soort anamnese is.

De dialectiek van de geloofsoriëntatie is de volgende dimensie die uit het materiaal naar voren komt (§10.3). In hoofdstuk 8 is aan de orde geweest hoe in het waarnemingsproces de geest van de hoorder wordt gericht op realiteiten in de preek. Als

het geloof van de hoorder wordt geactualiseerd, heeft deze oriëntatie twee kanten. Het geloof wordt georiënteerd op het Koninkrijk Gods, de ultieme werkelijkheid die ons bestaan transcendeert. Dat wat niet gezien wordt en toch geloofd. Deze eschatologische oriëntatie staat echter in nauw verband (vandaar: dialectiek) met een oriëntatie op het heden. Het geloof raakt ook georiënteerd op het leven dat gewoon geleefd moet worden van dag tot dag in het hier-en-nu.

De derde dimensie van het actualiseren van geloof bestaat uit de geloofsontmoeting (§10.4). Deze dimensie is sterk verbonden met het identificatieproces, dat we in hoofdstuk 9 hebben gezien. Deze doet zich bij hoorders op twee manieren voor. In het horen van de preek komt de Schrift als een kritisch tegenover naar de hoorder toe en wordt de ontmoeting met God op een confronterende manier ervaren. Daarbij is het ook mogelijk dat de religieuze herkenning in de preek bevestigend van aard is. Het geloof wordt op een bevestigende in plaats van confronterende manier geactualiseerd, als er nauwelijks afstand tussen leefwereld en preek wordt ervaren en de continuïteit meer aanwezig is dan de breuk tussen beiden.

Uiteindelijk stelt deze empirische analyse ons in staat om de vraag te beantwoorden hoe het luisteren naar preken godsdienstig gezien ‘werkt’ (§10.5). De dimensies oriëntatie en ontmoeting geven aanleiding om een typologie van het actualiseren van geloof op te stellen. In figuur 10.2 op pagina 270 is zichtbaar gemaakt hoe een combinatie van bevestiging met een hier-en-nu oriëntatie leidt tot *bemoedigend* geloofsinzicht; die van bevestiging en eschatologische oriëntatie tot een *vieren van heil*; de combinatie van confrontatie in het hier-en-nu tot een *paranetisch* inzicht, en van het kritisch tegenover in eschatologisch licht tot een inzicht van *bekering*. Deze vier inzichten kunnen worden beschouwd als de basistypen van actualiseren van geloof.

LUISTEREN NAAR PREKEN ALS GODSDIENSTIGE PRAKTIJK

HOOFDSTUK 11 vat het onderzoeksresultaat zoals dat in het vorige deel is gepresenteerd nogmaals samen in verband met twee belangrijke stromingen in de homiletiek, een postmodern esthetische en een retorische stroming (§11.1).

Vervolgens wordt de vraag gesteld hoe een descriptieve en conceptuele theorie zich verhoudt tot normatieve uitspraken over de godsdienstige praktijk (§11.2). Aan de hand van een wijsgerig-ethische tekst van Herbert McCabe wordt betoogd dat aan kennis over een goed-functionerende praktijk normatieve criteria kunnen worden ontleend voor het goede luisteren. In dat licht worden twee series met metaforen voor goed en verkeerd luisteren voorgesteld. Vanuit de basistypen van actualiseren van geloof die aan het slot van het vorige hoofdstuk zijn gepresenteerd, kan de hoorder worden gezien als respectievelijk pelgrim, mysticus, discipel en zondaar. Wanneer de oriëntatie- en ontmoetingsdimensie worden verabsoluteerd ontstaat er een religieuze pathologie van de hoorder die kan worden aangegeven met de volgende metaforen: legalist, gnosticus, naturalist en client.

Wat betekent deze empirische theorie op het terrein van de preekreceptie voor de homiletiek? Een aanzet hiervoor wordt gegeven met de typering dat prediking een tijdelijke huis opricht voor gelovigen in een seculiere wereld (§11.3). Hiertoe zou de homiletiek meer gebruik moeten maken van de inzichten uit de zogenaamde *transportatietheorie* in de communicatiewetenschap, in plaats van aan transmissie- of transforma-

tietheorieën. In het luisteren wordt de hoorder verplaatst naar de werkelijkheid van het geloof. Deze werkelijkheid staat in de spanning van het reeds en het nog niet van het Koninkrijk Gods; biedt de hoorder met zijn gefragmenteerde identiteit een tijdelijk thuis; en roept zowel herkenning als vervreemding op.

Het hoofdstuk besluit met een richting voor verder onderzoek (§11.4). In Grounded Theory wordt onderscheid gemaakt tussen substantiële en formele theorie-vorming. De begrippen uit deze studie kunnen betrokken worden in een onderzoek op andere velden, zoals bijvoorbeeld het pastorale gesprek, praise & worship events, en catechetische situaties. Anderszijds kunnen begrippen als 'gelovig betrokken raken' of 'actualiseren van geloof' ook gebruikt worden voor een overkoepelende praktisch-theologische theorie. Hiermee is iets aangegeven van de uitbreidbaarheid (modifiability) van Grounded Theory als onderzoeksmethode en de bruikbaarheid ervan binnen de praktische theologie.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Teunis Theodoor Johannes Pleizier was born on August 5th, 1975, in Hoevelaken. He received primary education at the Reformed primary school Schimmelpenninck-Van der Oye and went to Van Lodensteincollege in Amersfoort afterwards. He graduated from high school in 1993. From 1993-2001 he studied at the theological faculty of Utrecht University. In 1998 he was a member of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and did tutorials with Alistair E. McGrath, Sir Anthony Kenny and David Wenham.

In 2001 he graduated in Utrecht and wrote a thesis on the concept of freedom in the theological anthropology of Francesco Turretini, with subsidiary courses in Old Testament, Church History and Practical Theology. During his studies he was a member of the Reformed theological student body “Voetius”. He was an assistant at the departments of Church History and Practical Theology.

From 2001 to 2006 he had an appointment as a junior researcher, first at the (Reformed) Theological Institute, later at the Protestant Theological University (location Utrecht). During that time the research was done for his doctoral thesis on sermon reception. Since January 2007 he has been a part-time researcher in Practical Theology at the PThU. He joined Areopagus, a centre for contextual and missionary preaching (IZB – Society for Mission in the Netherlands). He is a member of the international board of Societas Homiletica.

Since April 2007 he has been a minister in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and serves as a pastor the Reformed congregation in Langerak ZH. In 1998 he married Margreet den Oudsten. They have two children, Joëlla (2000) and Christo (2004).